

# Historians Weigh In

reviewed by Andrew H. Hershey

This book is an anthology of 26 essays, each addressing some aspect of the Cold War. The book is divided into five sections: "First Skirmishes," "Police Action," "The Deep Cold War," "Vietnam: The Long Good-Bye," and "The End," with roughly five essays per section. The authors of these 26 essays are distinguished historians, among whom are the late Stephen E. Ambrose, Victor Davis Hanson, David McCullough, and Williamson Murray. The perspective lens through which the Cold War is viewed by the authors is almost exclusively an American one, though two essays, "Calamity on R.C. 4" by Douglas Porch and "Dien Bien Phu" by Williamson Murray, do deal with France and the Cold War as it played out in Vietnam. In this sense the title of the book is somewhat misleading and might have been better rendered as *The United States and the Cold War*. That said, all of the articles are of interest and well written,

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though they all have been excerpted or reworked from previously published versions and, therefore, are not new contributions to the field.

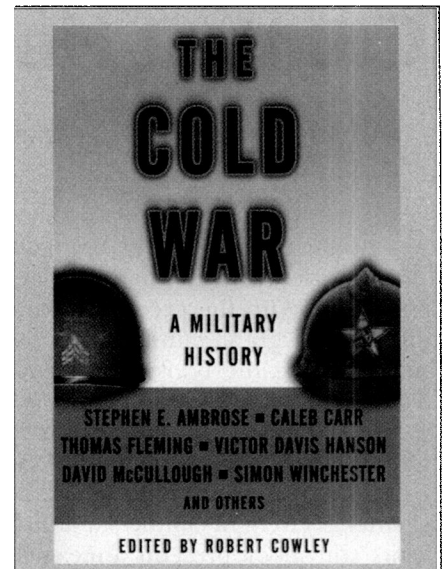
The articles range from the grand scale of the Cold War at the strategic level to the intimate, human side of the war. Examples of the former are the level of national policy and decisionmaking exhibited in Stephen E. Ambrose's "The Christmas Bombing," in which he examines the Nixon administration's resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam at a critical juncture in 1972, and John F. Guilmartin, Jr.'s "The ICBM and the Cold War: Technology in the Driver's Seat," which is an excellent account of the interaction between technology and policymaking. Examples of fine essays on the intimate,

human side of the Cold War addressing hot flare-ups, such as the thousands of servicemen killed in action, wounded in action, and prisoners of war, are Marilyn Elkins' "MIA" and Geoffrey Norman's "That's Ookay XX Time Is on Our Side." Such essays address the personal cost of the Cold War.

This macro and micro approach to the Cold War is strongly maintained throughout the book, as almost every other essay follows this rhythm, and the reader is never allowed to forget that the Cold War was not a policy wonk's abstract phrase but had a very personal side to it. These human side essays are not exclusively about individual losses suffered during the Cold War. Some pieces are just vignettes, such as Eugene B. Sledge's "Incident at Lang Fang" and Thomas B. Allen's fascinating essay, "Twilight Zone in the Pentagon," which notes Rod Serling's role in high-level wargames at the Pentagon in Room 1D-957,

which certainly adds another dimension to the Cold War.

The book is not without a few drawbacks. Its most glaring is the lack of a bibliography which, given the broad subject, need not have been a comprehensive one but rather a short listing at the end of each essay of the 5 or 10 sources most relevant to that essay. Two of these, James Warren's "The Mystery at Khe Sanh" and Ronald H. Spector's "The Evacuation of Kham Duc," though brief but sound accounts of these particular events, are not sufficiently tied to the Cold War theme for this reviewer, in contrast to, say, Williamson Murray's "Dien Bien Phu" essay in which he shows the reader what that battle meant for the U.S. policy of containment. I believe



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the book could also have benefited from two more essays—one dealing with the Cold War at sea (a topic not directly addressed), regarding the impact of nuclear powered submarines on the political-military decisionmaking process, and the other dealing with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—an article that surely belongs in the book's "The End" section. However, these slight slips do not amount to a reason not to read the anthology, which by its very nature is not directed so much at the scholar in the field of Cold War history but rather to those interested in the subject in general.



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