

# [Perfect spy by larry berman essay](https://assignbuster.com/perfect-spy-by-larry-berman-essay/)

The title of the book “ Perfect Spy” speaks for right term to describe the life story a person from the point of an American author. Professor Larry Berman is of course the American author while Pham Xuan An is the spy who was considered the Vietnam’s greatest undercover agent and multiply awarded hero of his country.

Berman has all the right to call An the “ Perfect Spy” because the agent benefited much from his education in the US soil but only to have used his skills learned to fight America in a most subtle way by helping the American enemy in the Vietnam War. The book is an account of a complex man who has put life in the line to with the intension of both saving his country from foreign invasion and saving the lives of a great number people on both sides of the Vietnam War. It was therefore by this account that An could be considered as more than a secret agent, a reporter, a Communist, since he was indeed a friend to many people. An was a man who transcended nationalities and hence he may be called a true internationalist and a humanitarian by his own merits. On the face of it, perhaps it was a political ideology that separated Pham Xuan An from America but as could be gleaned from the book, his attitude of wanting to prevent invasion of Vietnam may be viewed as humanitarian since the objective is to save people from the ravages of the war. But since the war still proceeded despite his best of intentions, would still be fair to consider him a humanitarian? What really is his real participation in the war? These and other interesting question will find their answer as the story of An explained in the following paragraphs.

An, in the story is known to have joined the Communist Party in the 1940s due to his belief in the anti-imperialist ideals of the party and its goal-uniting spirit for Vietnamese people under a sovereign power (Berman, 2007). He happened to oppose imperialism. He happened to believed in the capacity of nations to be independent and self sustaining without the other bigger or stronger countries having to mind small countries’ right for self determination and self governance. The year 1956 was an important part of his life as this was the year when An received a State Department scholarship to attend Fullerton College in California. This therefore necessitated him to travel to the US as a student. He studied journalism at a California college, and this eventually led him to have to have job in the press by covering Asia (Berman, 2007).

The ironies of life have it that a CIA agent would be the one to sponsor him (An) for an immigration status which is valid enough to cause him to live and study in California. If one would go back in time to understand why, perhaps it was because of good academic credentials and his personality of befriending people without regard of ideological problems. He therefore has to take his assignment to cover Asia and this indeed required him to build an impassable cover seriously. During his stay in the California school, he has become popular at the college he attended for a very short period of time. Under American school system, there could be no doubt that other nationalities coming to the land must have believed the American democracy.

As expected, An became known as an anti-Communist while working on the school paper. He even started an international club espousing democratic ideals and the same could have greatly caused him to have many strong friendships that lasted even before he died (Berman, 2007). While in the US, he also enjoyed American culture, could speak English, and made friends with a number of prominent Americans, this could be the great factor why the leadership of the independence forces may have found him deserving when they approached him about taking on a special mission. His enjoyment of American culture and everything was not enough to change his political ideology despite his having showed everybody that he is anti-communist while in school.

It was about in 1957 when An had to return to Saigon, Vietnam to work part time for The Associated Press and then for Reuters. Time Magazine has employed him from 1965 to April 1975, when Saigon fell (Berman, 2007). While in Vietnam, he took jobs with a range of news agencies and media outlets by covering the mounting crisis in his country. His academic preparation made him a ready asset to become an indispensable interpreter of Vietnamese language, culture, and politics which qualified him to work as an assistant to several famous reporters who were already covering the frightening war. His being a double agent was not known by many including the international correspondents like Frank McCulloch of Time, David Halberstam of The New York Times and Morley Safer of CBS News, until after the war. He was actually a colonel in the North Vietnamese Army and later awarded to become a general.

His being a double agent could only be very difficult for him although he had his loyalties to his country. Yet the same capacity could have only indicated his strength in getting access of much secret information. It should therefore be not surprising to for important people to have seen An’s press credentials and without equal knowledge that allowed him access to military briefings, even from top rank military officers both from the South Vietnamese and US militaries. His connections with the political insiders, business leaders and even from both countries’ intelligence agencies could have come as well from his unmatched records during his time. His access then to highly sensitive material, like many reporters, could have been very useful for An in his presentation of stories that favor the US and war media stories that make its palatable to American hearers but deep in his soul he may have been taking advantage and finding every opportunity how to help his people from the planned attacks of the American forces in Vietnam.

As expected and true to his being called a spy, it should not be also surprising for An to have used convincing sensitive information he obtained from various channels as his basis for secret strategic reports to be forwarded through his contacts back to the North Vietnamese intelligence people, which the latter used in making plans against the American Supported-South Vietnam. Author Larry Berman nicely described in the book how Vietnamese victories might have benefited from the information coming from An. These Vietnamese victories include the Battle of Ap Bac in 1961 and the Tet Offensive in 1968 (Berman, 2007). The final collapse of the South Vietnamese forces in 1973 through the attack initiated by the North Vietnamese could have only been very thankful for the reports of An. The story also tries to weigh which is the more important values to people. It could be asked for example whether friendship is limited to people who are the same side of the fence or whether there be friends among the citizens of warring nations.

The life of An appeared to have tried answering this set of questions. In the story An was able to developed a strong friendships with American reporters and even the others who are against his secret aims. This could mean that an international reporter although bound by their international ethics, if such exists, may have knowingly agreed with An by not revealing to the Americans his true identity that he is spy during the War. If such is true, it may be explained that people are essentially with biases that could be accepted no matter is the nationality or the political ideology subscribed too.

For those who only came to know the war, it may be argued that An was just wise enough not to have told them his secret. For An, politics was a different dimension from personal friendships. It may be noted from the book that most people who dealt with him while the war happened, preserved a positive and reverential image of him, even if they learned about his true identity after. These people may have thought that a man like An who had been a Communist for more or less the rest of his life may just be a man trying to live with what he believed.

They would like to see that war was not a matter of personalities or of nationalism. It was not even seen by these people as a matter of hate among parties because of the war. They rather would like to view the situation as systems conflict where people were just made as part due to the necessity of capitalism as against it opposing ideology. A few people have may have called him a traitor of his own country but an evidence is still to be presented that An had in fact betrayed humanity. If the evidence is his having participating in a war effort along with millions of others from the Vietnamese, the French and the Americans, it could argued that he neither wanted nor started the war too. He could have only attempted to save lives of people and without him in the course of war, perhaps more lives would have been lost.

If such inference could be accepted with an unbiased mind from the readers perhaps there is basis to call Pham Xuan An, an internationalist or humanitarian or a human right advocate in his own right. It may concluded that that nationalism become relative when one talks of international human right for right to happiness. While other may view that An was a spy to America, he is also viewed as hero by his country. Other people would further view him as an internationalist or a humanitarian. Man’s worth thus is viewed differently from different perspectives but one who can see the contribution of a man although such person have opposing ideology as that of An is man who has transcended personalities and the concept of traditional nationalism and is now a person who can also live in the realm of universal ideas.

Included in this group who has maintained their respect despite their discovery that An was spy for Vietnam despite having educated himself in the US and having sent his family there.