

## The Art of Diplomacy

Review by Melissa Reed

Howard B. Schaffer. *Ellsworth Bunker: Global Troubleshooter, Vietnam Hawk*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003, 380 pp. \$34.95

In the realm of diplomatic history, typically only those who have walked the uppermost corridors of power garner public attention. Consequently, most historians and biographers focus their efforts on documenting the lives of these secretaries of state and national security advisors. However, as Howard Schaffer's book *Ellsworth Bunker: Global Troubleshooter, Vietnam Hawk* proves, the fact that one may not immediately recognize the name of the subject does not mean that he should not qualify for a biogra-

phy. Bunker, a sugar industry businessman and lobbyist turned diplomat, became a mainstay of the United States Foreign Service as one of their most dependable negotiators. Over a career spanning approximately forty years, the State Department called upon him to diffuse some of the most delicate circumstances facing this country during the height of the Cold War. Equal parts biography, diplomatic history, and commentary on the practice of diplomacy, Schaffer's book provides an insightful look at the Foreign Service over the past half-century. Schaffer, a retired career diplomat now with Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, narrates Bunker's career in a style strikingly similar to Bunker's negotiation approach: measured, meticulous, nonjudgmental, and forthright, with equal parts formality and

warmth. While first and foremost a tribute to one of the most committed and called-upon American diplomats of the twentieth century, *Ellsworth Bunker: Global Troubleshooter, Vietnam Hawk* provides a nuanced commentary on the practice of diplomacy from someone with practical experience in the field.

As an account of Bunker's career first and foremost, Schaffer's book excels. He thoroughly chronicles the extensive diplomatic career of one of the United States' most prominent diplomats, deftly moving between mundane diplomatic dispatches and personal anecdotes from Bunker's career to present the reader with a complete picture of Bunker as a person as well as a diplomat. Indeed, Schaffer constantly cites Bunker's personal traits as keys to his success. The former sugar businessman had a keen grasp of human nature, as well as the innate ability to read people and situations very well. Always aware of the subtleties of each situation, Bunker honed the skills necessary to succeed in any negotiating setting. In his eyes, only by employing empathy and cre-

optimal results.

Schaffer uses several examples throughout the book to relate Bunker's considerable diplomatic talent. This particularly manifested itself in his ability to forge strong relationships with government officials in his host country. The author uses his detailed account of Bunker's unusually close relationship with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru during his stint as Ambassador to India to demonstrate the value of Bunker's personability. The exceptional rapport between the two proved invaluable to US-India relations as the young state sought to find its way in the context of the Cold War. Bunker's unique ability to balance close, almost familial relationships with foreign leaders with the indispensable formality appropriate to his role as ambassador enabled him to achieve great success in furthering United States interests and diffusing international tensions.

Schaffer's descriptions of Bunker's tours throughout the world are replete with accounts of his considerable ability to adapt to

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ativity, and by acknowledging that all sides must benefit from negotiation, could a diplomat achieve

a situation as the circumstances demanded. In India, the "elitist" way he looked, talked, and dressed

proved critical. While working on events in the Dominican Republic, his patience, courtesy, and thoughtfulness served to help diffuse a potential Marxist uprising. In Vietnam, Bunker benefited from strong, personal bonds with his staff. Through an analysis of Bunker's different posts, Schaeffer paints a convincing picture of how the diplomat's flexibility and personal instincts guided him to become one of the most trusted officers in the Foreign Service.

However, certain readers, especially aspiring or current Foreign Service officers and students of diplomacy, may take issue with this biography. Schaeffer describes a man with no formal academic or professional training in diplomacy, nor any knowledge of the languages and cultures of the countries to which he assigned, who nevertheless reached the highest diplomatic posts. Schaeffer accurately describes Bunker as a man with proven capabilities very well-suited to the art of diplomacy, implicitly perpetuating the idea that language acquisition and cultural knowledge may be unnecessary in the upper echelons of diplomacy. The book, whether intentionally or not, exposes the tensions between politically appointed diplomats and Foreign Service officers. Schaeffer concludes his account by stressing the important role Bunker played as chairman of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University, a position that reveals Bunker's appreciation and interest

in the formal training and study of diplomacy, yet there is no denying the tension inherent between the two views throughout the book.

Another contradiction presents itself in Schaeffer's account of Bunker as a diplomat uninterested in shaping foreign policy—in other words, as a man who understood his role as a cog within the machine. This seems unlikely, as a few instances in the book suggest. In Vietnam, for example, Bunker's meticulous and admittedly optimistic weekly updates regarding the status of the war early in his tenure as ambassador seem motivated by a desire to shape facts for political purposes. Bunker was aware from his experience as ambassador to Indonesia that his "objective" reporting to Washington could influence policy. Nevertheless, Schaeffer maintains that "misleadingly and excessively sanguine reporting and analysis was one of the persistent weaknesses of his leadership of the Saigon mission," a conclusion that a more cynical reader may find overly generous and contradictory to the author's portrayal of Bunker as a wholly objective observer.

Despite the abovementioned shortcomings, the strengths of Schaeffer's book outweigh the negatives. In addition to providing an insightful description of Bunker's diplomatic career, Schaeffer takes full advantage of the fact that his subject's career spanned three decades of highly-charged United States diplomatic history. The

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