

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

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## **Book Reviews**

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

Ellsworth Bunker is best-known for his time spent as American ambassador to South Vietnam during the height of the Vietnam conflict. His dedication to the policies of both Presidents Johnson and Nixon from 1967 to 1973 never wavered even as the controversy over US involvement escalated to a fevered pitch. Unfortunately, Bunker's prominent association with Vietnam cast a shadow over his many other important contributions to American diplomacy, contributions spanning almost 30 years.

Now, Howard Schaffer, in this first ever biography of the "Yankee Vermonter," attempts to portray Bunker's varied diplomatic experiences. With detailed accounts of the many conflicts that Bunker dealt with besides Vietnam, Schaeffer sheds light on Bunker's distinguished service under seven US presidents.

The author, a retired US Foreign Service officer himself and former US ambassador to Bangladesh, is currently Director of Studies at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University, the same institute for which Bunker served as the board's first chair in 1978. Bunker helped bridge the world of academia to that of foreign policy professionals after his retirement from public service, and Howard Schaffer continues this commitment today. According to Schaffer, writing his first book, *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War*, "whetted his interest" in writing biography, and Ellsworth Bunker was the ideal subject for his next biography on another "practitioner of foreign policy." The fact that Bunker's diplomatic career did not even begin until he was fifty-six, after retiring as a leader in the American sugar industry, adds to the remarkable story of his 90 years.

It was not until 1951 that President Truman invited Bunker to serve him as US ambassador to Argentina. The diplomatic skills acquired from his years of lobbying in Washington for the sugar industry, along with Bunker's patient demeanor, made Bunker a perfect candidate for diplomatic duty.

Bunker had been born in Yonkers, New York, but later went on to adopt the New England persona he gained from his summer home in Dummerston Downs, Vermont. Ellsworth cultivated this image in his diplomatic career and many were surprised to find out that he was not a native New Englander.

Schaffer's life of Bunker continues chronologically with his formative years at Yale, the sugar industry in Washington, to his work on the Panama Canal Treaty, and ends with Henry Kissinger's Middle East negotiations in 1973. All the while Schaffer reiterates the man was more than just the Vietnam "hawk" so many Americans took him for and details the contributions that Bunker made to US foreign relations during the Cold War.



Schaffer accomplishes his goal of reestablishing Bunker's unwavering dedication to the American cause in conflicts and diplomatic negotiations other than the Vietnam disaster. Schaffer gives in-depth descriptions of a number of conflicts and the background behind each ordeal, including the delicate situation in Peron's Argentina during Bunker's first tour of duty as US ambassador, as well as the overthrow of the monarchy in Yemen that led to Bunker's involvement in the volatile Middle East. Schaffer makes clear Bunker's understanding of the aspirations and perceptions of each negotiating party and the dilemmas each faced. But at times, Schaffer's historical narrative leaves the reader feeling disassociated from Bunker himself, waiting to get back to Bunker's own involvement. Overall, though, the historical background adds to, rather than detracts from, the book by demonstrating the significance of the conflicts Bunker dealt with.

Schaeffer describes how turmoil in a small country in the Middle East, like Yemen, could have such a strong impact on its neighbors and the power struggle of the Cold War. Schaeffer offers both background for the *coup d'état* in September of 1962, as well as Bunker's dealings with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Faisal and Egyptian President Nasser. Egyptian support for the new Yemen Arab Republic caused ire and trepidation in the Saudi regime as it perceived the YAR as a threat to Saudi borders. The Saudi-Yemeni-Egyptian confrontation, following so closely after the Cuban missile crisis, immediately gained the attention not only of the United States but also of the communist bloc. Bunker's ability to "gain confidence of suspicious, tough minded, prickly antagonists," aided the US, and to a lesser extent the UN, in implementing Bunker's eight-point disengagement program. Bunker's skill in conflict resolution not only de-escalated the threat of a serious Saudi-Egyptian confrontation, but also served American interests well because the Soviets, despite the coup, were "unable to achieve paramount influence in Yemen."

Even so, the Vietnam conflict is by no means glossed over: it consumes almost a third of the biography and rightfully so. Conspicuously missing, however, is any information about Bunker's thoughts and feelings regarding two towering domestic events that shaped American foreign policy: the Kennedy assassination and the Watergate scandal. On the other hand, Schaffer uses never before published declassified material from the National Archives and from the Johnson, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Ford Presidential Libraries to forcefully portray Bunker as an accomplished statesman. Bunker's diplomatic service under arduous circumstances even to the advanced age of eighty-five is an example of what a "diplomatic craftsman" should be: quietly effective and non-partisan. Schaffer's book will be a good read for anyone with an appreciation of diplomacy and the skills needed to bring about conflict resolution.

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