

Bucknell

MAGAZINE

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Building Diplomacy

Bucknellians are helping to create a unified globe, piece by piece.



NEPAL

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

AFGHANISTAN

SIERRA LEONE

ISRAEL

BUCKNELLIANS BUILDING DEMOCRACIES

By Theresa Gawlas Medoff '85, P'13

From Afghanistan to Sierra Leone, Bucknellians shape world events.
Read how eight alumni are doing just that.

Afghanistan, says its former ambassador, **William B. Wood '72**, "is a very foreign place." One of the few countries in the world that never experienced colonialism, it also has remained largely undiluted by globalizing influences. Afghanistan has seen the largest refugee flows in the world. It has a 30 percent literacy rate, and the average life expectancy is just 45 years. For the past 30 years, the country has been besieged with war, insurgency and instability.

A professional foreign service officer since 1977, Ambassador Wood is newly posted at the National War College in Washington, D.C., where he teaches members of the State Department, Armed Forces and other civilian employees preparing to assume greater policy and strategic responsibilities.

Wood is the most senior of an impressive number of Bucknellians who work for the State Department in Washington, D.C., representing America to the far reaches of the globe.

He is no stranger to regions of conflict. He served in Uruguay during the brief time it was under a military dictatorship, began his posting in El Salvador at the beginning of a multi-year insurgent threat, and from 2003 to 2007 headed up the U.S. embassy in Colombia, where terrorism and drug trafficking combined to make it one of the most dangerous countries in South America.

Afghanistan is a greater challenge than any of those places, Wood says, and yet it is a challenge we must meet. First and

foremost, he says, because the September 11 Al Qaeda attacks were launched from Afghanistan, and we must defeat the Taliban and stabilize Afghanistan so that they cannot return. And second, because Afghanistan has been an important source of instability in a very volatile area. "From a regional perspective, Afghanistan will be either part of the solution or part of the problem," Wood says.

During his 2007–09 tenure as ambassador to Afghanistan, Wood acted as a bridge between the presidents of the two countries, meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai four to five times a week. He was in charge of all civilian officials in the country, working in the political, economic, law enforcement, intelligence and development arenas. He also was charged with ensuring that the civilian and military structures in Afghanistan "shake hands and work well together" — not a trivial challenge in a country with such a large multilateral military and civilian presence.

The initial hope was that with the Taliban removed from power, Afghanistan would be able to heal itself. Good elections and a constitution were a start, Wood notes, but not enough to overcome the effects of three decades of war and turmoil.

While not fully satisfied with what he was able to accomplish there, Wood is proud that despite the threat environment, the shortage of development personnel and the extreme decentralization of Afghanistan, he was able to improve cooperation among local governments, communities and tribes.



THE CONGO: MAPPING FOR HUMANITY

Each month, more than 1,000 women and girls are raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and yet they are just some of the victims in a region the central government has long struggled to control. Security forces, rebel organizations, militias and other armed groups have inflicted brutal sexual violence upon the civilian population on a massive scale. "There are thousands of reports of horrible things happening to women and children there," says **Lee Schwartz '76**, "but few of these are being put together systematically in a way that can help achieve justice and accountability."

As director of the State Department's Office of the Geographer and Global Issues in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in Washington, D.C., Schwartz and his staff are helping to coordinate the process of collecting and reporting on violence in the DRC and — just as importantly — working to link those reports to satellite imagery and other information that might show the movements of militia leaders.

"Linking the geospatial data on things such as gender-based violence with the movements of particular groups and military campaigns brings us closer to determining who bears responsibility for widespread and unchecked human rights violations," Schwartz explains. Such documentation has been used by Schwartz's office in the past to document atrocities in Darfur and to help bring war criminals to justice in former Yugoslavia.

Schwartz, who also holds the title Geographer of the United States, earned a doctorate in geography from Columbia

University and joined the State Department in 1992.

This past fall, Schwartz was honored with the Bucknell Award of Merit, one of the highest awards given to alumni. He credits Dick Peterrec, professor emeritus of geography, with being a longtime inspiration and mentor.

Schwartz's office, comprising both geographers and foreign affairs analysts, has broad responsibilities in the State Department. With the digital precision that GPS systems afford, the office is remapping virtually all of the world's boundaries — and making that information widely and transparently available. "A line on a map could represent 100 or more yards on land," Schwartz says. "Knowing exactly where the U.S. government says the border is could help to prevent conflict."

The office is working as well to implement "participatory mapping" tools that make use of cell phone and GPS technologies to map crowd sourcing, social networking and other growing sources of on-the-ground knowledge. Similar technologies are being promoted for use by indigenous peoples to establish land ownership rights, which are lacking in much of the developing world.

The office also is charged with addressing problems that do not fit neatly into the State Department's regional bureaus — refugees, human rights issues and international environmental concerns. His recent focus has been on using geospatial science to promote sustainable development in Africa.

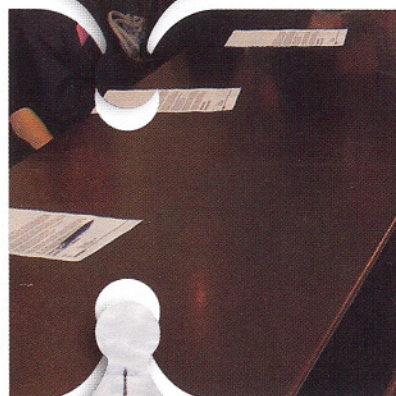
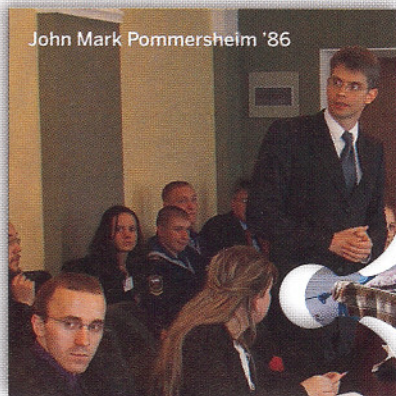
SIERRA LEONE: STABILIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Authorities spotted it in waters off Freetown, Sierra Leone: a Taiwanese-flagged fishing vessel that had just hauled in between \$300,000 and \$500,000 of fish — illegally. West African fisheries are among the richest in the world, but with local governments lacking resources for enforcement, poachers are robbing Africans of their livelihood and damaging the environment in the process. They weren't getting away with it this time.

These particular poachers were seized Aug. 17, 2009, by Sierra Leone authorities and crewmembers of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Legare* in a joint operation allowed under a bilateral maritime assistance treaty between the U.S. and Sierra Leone, signed on behalf of the U.S. by Charge d'Affaires **Glenn Fedzer '85**. A World Bank fisheries expert called that first seizure "globally significant" as a strong deterrent for other illegal fishing activities. In addition, Fedzer hopes the fines and penalties imposed are used by the Sierra Leone government to work toward building its own enforcement capacity.

"Profitable and sustainable economic activities are essential to helping fragile states maintain stability, and artisanal fishing communities particularly suffer when their waters are overexploited," Fedzer says. "Many people attribute problems off the coast of Somalia to overfishing, saying that today's pirates are

John Mark Pommersheim '86





David Fay '86



yesterday's artisanal fishermen, now without livelihoods because their fish stocks have been nearly wiped out by foreign fishing vessels."

Fedzer, who joined the State Department in 1998, has spent the past six years in sub-Saharan Africa — in Gabon, Mali and now Sierra Leone. He currently heads the Embassy in Sierra Leone pending the appointment of an Ambassador later in the year.

There is no typical day at work, he says. In the space of two days recently, Fedzer talked with American students in Sierra Leone studying international nutrition, met with local officials in a remote border town about a road-building project, and represented the U.S. at a ceremony with the Chinese foreign minister and the Sierra Leone minister of education. Another evening he had dinner with the Minister of Energy to discuss solar power in rural communities. Among the other issues Fedzer and his staff are addressing: gay rights, narcotics trafficking, economic development, anti-corruption and political instability.

"People in Africa need and want help, and they want the United States to be involved," Fedzer says. "I really feel like what I'm doing matters."

RUSSIA: RELATING TO COLD WAR RIVALS

John Mark Pommersheim '86 was sitting at his desk in the U.S. Consulate in Vladivostok, Russia, when the news came in: North Korea had just conducted a nuclear test, not far from the Russian Far East city where he was living and working. Whatever had been on his schedule for the day was immediately pushed off. Instead, Pommersheim worked the phones to find out what Russian officials in the area knew about the nuclear test, while his staff set out to gauge local effects and reaction.

Sharing information with the Russians about events in North Korea once would have been unthinkable, but the former Soviet Union — and its relationship with the U.S. — has undergone tremendous changes since the early 1980s. Pommersheim has witnessed quite a few of them.

He first visited the country as an undergraduate student of Russian and political science and returned twice for postgraduate studies. He was in Minsk, Belarus, after the 1992 collapse of the Soviet Union, when the newly formed republic was returning legacy nuclear weapons to Moscow's control. He worked on the Russia desk in Washington, D.C., and then returned again, this time to Vladivostok, where he served as the U.S. consul general from 2004 to 2007.

"The Russian Far East is a fascinating place, two-thirds the size of the continental United States," Pommersheim says. "We worked on a lot of different issues, from the large oil projects on Sakhalin Island to U.S.-Russian military-to-military contacts to cooperation on people-to-people contacts between the U.S., mainly Alaska and the West Coast, and Pacific Russia."

In one of his more unusual relationship-building activities, Pommersheim appeared as a guest chef on a Russian cooking program, there to make a "typical U.S. dish." He chose to make Maryland crab cakes — substituting Kamchatka king crab for Maryland blue — and accompanied the dish with Californian and other American regional wines, an increasingly popular U.S. export to Russia.

Fast forward to 2010, when another Bucknellian is serving with the State Department in Russia. The task for David Fay '86, a regional English language officer stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, is to update Russians' views of America.

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"When a country goes so many years without an election, no one knows where they stand and what to expect."

American studies in Russia had long been taught using one- to two-page excerpts from 19th century literary works by authors like Emerson, Poe and Melville. Fay and his staff provide access to more contemporary teaching materials. A recent DVD, for examples, uses Voice of America and other podcasts to create lessons around human interest stories. The idea, he says, is to build a more encompassing view of the U.S. than that presented in music, film and other popular media.

"Most countries are anxious to have support for their English teaching programs, and we give them that," Fay says. "We bring over American experts, send locals to the U.S. and develop curriculum, materials and assessment tools."

NEPAL: NURTURING DEMOCRACIES

When CNN announced returns on the evening of the 2008 U.S. presidential election, **Anne Bennett '87** watched the coverage in the company of Nepalese citizens invited to the embassy in Kathmandu for an election results party. It was one of a series of election-related events hosted by the embassy for students, academics and younger political party members in Nepal. As a political officer who had previously taught political science at the university level, Bennett was one of the experts called upon to help teach influential Nepalese citizens about U.S.-style democracy.

The lessons had vital relevance in a country that just seven months before had held its own historic election. After decades of political unrest that included reforms and counter-reforms, political assassinations, a violent insurgency and the dissolution of multiple governments, in April 2008 the people of Nepal had elected a Constituent Assembly to serve as a parliament and write a new constitution.

Leading up to that election, Bennett had met with leaders of the various Nepalese political parties and worked with local groups and other diplomatic missions to coordinate sending election-monitoring teams to observe the polls in districts

across the country.

"When a country goes so many years without an election, no one knows where they stand and what to expect," says Bennett, who has since returned to the U.S. to learn Urdu for her next assignment at the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan.

During the same period when Bennett was working to support democracy in Nepal, **Katie Kohn McLain '03** was working for the State Department in Washington, D.C., on efforts to foster democracy in Iraq. As a grants officer for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor in Iraq, McLain helped to coordinate myriad nation-building projects. "I oversaw grants for voter education, violence prevention, get-out-the-vote campaigns and other grassroots efforts," McLain says.

McLain also administered grants to organizations offering free legal assistance to Iraqis in cases ranging from domestic violence to property disputes to human rights threats, she says.

Since December, McLain has worked for the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs with a focus on Central America, a position that draws heavily on the Latin American subspecialty of her international relations major.

THE NEAR EAST: REPRESENTING THE U.S.

The photos coming out of Gaza were heart wrenching: hungry people begging for food, sick and injured without medical supplies, vehicles without fuel and abandoned along the roadside. In an attempt to stop the flow of arms to Hamas during the Gaza War, Israel had tightened its 18-month-old economic blockade, and humanitarian aid was no longer reaching the people.

An Al Jazeera reporter put the question to **Ann Donick Somerset '98**: Why was the U.S. allowing Israel to get away with this?

As the Washington, D.C.-based spokesperson for the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Somerset was

International Relations @ 25

Bucknell prepares students for global challenges.

The International Relations Program at Bucknell celebrated its 25th anniversary last fall with a special coming-of-age announcement: The program is now a full-fledged academic department.

The International Relations major, in existence officially since 1984 and as an interdepartmental major since 1973, already had set Bucknell University apart from its frame-of-reference and aspirant schools, few of which offer such a major. "We were very fortunate to have people like Professors Tom Travis, Richard Peterec, John Peeler and Robert Beard [all now retired] with the commitment, charisma and foresight to begin building this program back then," says Emek Uçarer, chair of the department.

"In an increasingly globalized and interdependent world, it is critically important for us to be informed about world events, to understand how the international system works, and to explain and interpret world affairs. IR offerings seek to offer such opportunities."

Already, 1,200 Bucknellians have graduated with an IR degree, and another 45-50 join their ranks each year, along with a dozen or so minors. The IR curriculum at Bucknell has always had a multidisciplinary approach, with courses drawn from economics, history, geography, international relations, political science and foreign languages. Students have a geographic area concentration as well as an advanced foreign-language requirement. Most study abroad in the region of their specialization.

Beginning with the Class of 2014, the major also requires students to take three courses from a thematic track of their choice: Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, Sustainability and Development or Global Governance and Conflict Resolution.

IR alumni have taken a broad array of career paths, most of which have some international connections, Uçarer says. They have gone on to graduate school and law school, to volunteer commitments like Teach for America and the Peace Corps, and to jobs with the government, nongovernmental organizations, nonprofits and the private sector.

The department also benefits non-majors with courses, programming and outreach designed to get students excited about and engaged in international affairs, including programs sponsored this year in conjunction with the University's new MacArthur Chair in East Asian Politics.



Emek Uçarer, associate professor of international relations

often on camera several times a day during the three-month war in the winter of 2008-09. "There is a widespread belief in the Arab media that the U.S. has a lot of influence over Israel. I kept emphasizing that Israel is a sovereign state and that we do not control its actions," Somerset says. She also tried to point out that Hamas had a responsibility to care for its people, and that by sending rockets into Israel, it had abdicated that responsibility.

"It was a very challenging period," Somerset recalls. "During this time we were also trying to end the war as soon as possible and address humanitarian needs. We were coordinating convoys with humanitarian assistance, sending in oil tankers so Gaza would not run out of power and trying to evacuate Americans from the region."

Somerset began working for the State Department not long after she graduated from Bucknell. Eight years into the job, she already had battle experience. Her assignment as the senior desk officer for Lebanon (another Washington, D.C., posting) had begun just one week after the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah commenced in July 2006. She finished that assignment in 2008 and moved on to the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. Since October she has worked as the special assistant to the undersecretary of public diplomacy and public affairs.

Diplomacy, says Wood, is no mystery. It's something we all engage in individually many times a day, whenever we get two or more parties to agree on a project plan at work or a movie at the cineplex. Of course, the challenges — and the stakes — are much greater for diplomats negotiating with sovereign powers who sometimes have competing goals. The job can be frustrating at times, but in the end, these Bucknellians say, they know they are making a difference. **B**

Theresa Gawlas Medoff '85, P'13, a regular contributor to Bucknell Magazine, is the 2010 Delaware Press Association Communicator of Achievement.