



Photos courtesy of U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan

Editor's note: *The U.S. Senate confirmed the nomination of Ryan Crocker as ambassador to Iraq on March 6, 2007, the day this issue went to press. When he was interviewed, prior to his confirmation, Crocker felt it would be inappropriate to answer questions on Iraq policy.*

(L-to-R) U.S. Rear Admiral Mike LeFever, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Ryan Crocker '71 and USAID Disaster Assistance Response leader Bill Berger held a press conference in Pakistan on Oct. 20, 2005, detailing the U.S. relief effort following the earthquake that killed more than 70,000 people earlier that month.

Q & A

with Ryan Crocker '71
U.S. Ambassador to Iraq



Over the past two months, Ambassador Ryan Crocker '71 has traveled back and forth from Islamabad, Pakistan, to Washington, D.C., for briefings and confirmation hearings, preparing for his new role as ambassador to Iraq while still working in the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. He also has made time for Whitman, meeting with President George Bridges in D.C., and agreeing to share with fellow alumni, via e-mail, the following insights about his career.

Q How has your career prepared you for this momentous role in Iraq?

A Most of my career has been in the Middle East, including an earlier tour in Iraq. I was in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam in 2003, and undertook several missions to the Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Iraq in 2001 and 2002. I know many of the current leaders and speak Arabic. Now we'll find out just how well prepared I am.

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RYAN CROCKER '71

Q What parts of your liberal arts education at Whitman remain with you and inform your key role as an ambassador and diplomat?

A As an English major under the legendary Tom Howells, I learned to appreciate complexity and subtlety, to discern the figure in the carpet (the title of the Henry James story I analyzed for my senior oral). It was invaluable training in how to think about complex foreign societies. From history professor Fred Breit I learned discipline and mental toughness.

The Whitman experience continues to produce great talent for the State Department. **Danielle Garbe '97** is a special assistant to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. **Erika Olson '95** is a watch officer in the department's Operations Center. **Mark Lanning '02** is in Guangzhou, China. **Hillary Batjer Johnson '92** works in the Office of Combating Terrorism. Of my generation, **Sally Mathiasen Light '68** directs senior Foreign Service assignments. **Cliff Brown '72** is a senior officer with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). I hope that some of Whitman's current students will consider the Foreign Service. They will definitely have the skills to succeed.

Q Our perceptions of ambassadors often come from characters we see on TV or in films hosting elaborate state dinners. The reality, of course, is much different, especially in the extreme trouble spots of the world. What has your job entailed in Pakistan?

A Pakistan is a close ally in the war on terror and has lost more than 700 of its soldiers in the struggle with a common enemy since Sept. 11, 2001. We are engaged in a near fight and a long fight. The near fight is against al-Qaida and Taliban that have found a foothold in Pakistan's remote tribal areas and inside Afghan refugee camps. In late January, the Pakistani Army carried out a successful attack on an al-Qaida training camp it identified in the hills of South Waziristan, using U.S.-supplied Cobra helicopters.

The long fight aims at helping Pakistan extend governance, economic development and rule of law throughout the country so that Pakistani territory can never again be used by an enemy. This requires all the instruments of our national power — economic, informational, political as well

Crocker, third from left, meets with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, fourth from left, and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, center, at the presidential palace in Islamabad, Pakistan, on June 27, 2006.



Ryan Crocker '71 in the Bajaur Tribal Agency, Northwest Frontier Province, Pakistan, in December.

as military. A dozen different U.S. agencies are represented at the Embassy. My job is to ensure that their efforts are coordinated and resourced to support these main goals.

And we have to carry out our mission in a critical-threat environment — that training camp was a little over 100 miles from the Embassy. A car bomb attack on our Consulate General in Karachi nine months ago killed an American officer.

Q What has been the most rewarding experience of your career?

A There have been many over the years. One of the more recent was coordinating the successful U.S. relief effort in the aftermath of the Oct. 8, 2005, earthquake that killed more than 70,000 Pakistanis in a few minutes. The U.S. needed to respond to a close friend and ally, and within 48 hours, U.S. military helicopters were on the ground in Pakistan and the first air shipment of U.S. relief supplies had arrived. A massive U.S. relief effort developed (lasting six months) that at its peak had more than 1,400 U.S. personnel deployed and included two military field hospitals in remote parts of the earthquake zone. The helicopter relief operation became the longest sustained humanitarian mission since the Berlin airlift. The entire relief operation was coordinated by the Embassy, whose staff worked seven days a week. It was a great example of unity of effort. The U.S. military and civilian agencies led by USAID saved thousands of lives.

Q Have changing administrations, and changes within administrations, impacted your work?



Photo by Josie Duckett

A Each administration has its own priorities and style. The job of the career Foreign Service officer is to offer his best advice as policy is formulated and then to implement that policy. Our elected leaders need to have the confidence that we will carry out policies to the best of our ability.

Q What would you like to share with us about your family?

A I met my wife, Christine, in Baghdad in 1979. She was also a member of the Foreign Service. Our first assignment together was Beirut in 1981 at the height of the Lebanese civil war. It was clear then that the choice was a family or the Service. We have been together ever since and look forward to going back to Baghdad.

Q How did your passion for running begin? Do the "critical-threat" environments you work in slow you down?

A I ran track in high school and didn't like it. I didn't run at Whitman but got interested again during the first big running boom in the U.S. in the mid-'70s and have been a committed runner since 1975. I try to get in an hour a day, normally in the early morning — I find I have few schedule conflicts at 5 a.m. I have managed to run everywhere I've been — Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan. Sometimes security conditions dictate a pretty short course — around and around the Embassy in Kabul, for example — but I have always managed.

Q You were on the verge of retiring when you agreed instead to accept the appointment to Iraq. What was the driving force behind your decision?

A It is still our intention to eventually retire to the Spokane Valley in Washington State, which is where I am from. I have been in the Foreign Service for 35 years. Before that, I grew up with a father who was a career Air Force officer. I learned early that when you are called to serve, you do not say no.

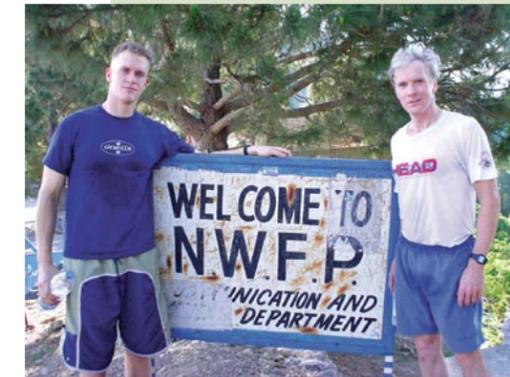
UP CLOSE

Born: June 19, 1949, in Spokane, Wash.

Attended schools: Morocco, Turkey, Canada and the United States.

Education: B.A. in English (1971) and honorary Doctor of Laws degree (2001), both from Whitman.

Foreign Service career: Since joining in 1971, Crocker has had assignments in Iran, Qatar, Iraq, Egypt and Washington, D.C., in addition to serving as ambassador in Lebanon (1990-93), Kuwait (1994-97), Syria (1998-2001) and Pakistan (2004-present). Other key posts include Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (August 2001 to May 2003); first Director of Governance for the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad (May-August 2003); International Affairs Adviser at the National War College (2003-2004).



U.S. Marine Sgt. Miklos, left, and Crocker at the end of a 10-mile uphill run from Islamabad to the Northwest Frontier Province line.

A Jan. 11, 2007, *Washington Post* story noted that Crocker was "bloodied, but not seriously injured." The same article quotes *The New York Times* correspondent Thomas Friedman, who lived nearby and raced to the site of the bombing: "I came around the corner and there was the American Embassy cut in half like a doll's house, bodies hanging out of it, smoke belching, and the first person I saw staggering around in the ruins was Ryan, his sleeves rolled up, looking in the rubble."

Honors: Presidential Distinguished Service Award, 1994; Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Civilian Service, 1997; Presidential Meritorious Service Award, 1999, 2003; State Department Distinguished Honor Award; Award for Valor; three Superior Honor Awards; American Foreign Service Association Rivkin Award. In January 2002, Crocker was sent to Afghanistan to reopen the American Embassy in Kabul and subsequently received the Robert C. Frasure Memorial Award for "exceptional courage and leadership" in Afghanistan. In September 2004, President George W. Bush conferred on him the personal rank of Career Ambassador, the highest in the Foreign Service.

Photo at top right courtesy of Mary Jane Corliss Shea '71. Photos above and top left courtesy of Ryan Crocker '71.



Ryan '71 and Christine Crocker