

**As a diplomat committed to helping countries in need, Larry Roeder Jr. '74 can be found**



*Larry Roeder Jr. visits Maridi, South Sudan, while on a trip to Africa visiting camps for displaced persons and refugees. Twenty kilometers behind is a pitched battle between rebels and soldiers.*

## Where the Action Is

BY LAURA NELSON

"I like to be where the action is," says Larry Roeder Jr. '74 trying to explain some of the potentially dangerous situations and countries he has been in. But action is not the only driving force behind Roeder. Ever since graduating from Culver-Stockton, he has used his training and knowledge to help disadvantaged countries any way he can.

The son of an American consul, Roeder was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and before reaching college age, lived in countries that included Egypt, Italy, France, Cuba and Germany.

"It was absolutely terrific traveling," said Roeder. "Most kids learn about other countries and cultures from books. I got to see the countries and meet the people."

At a young age, Roeder was already living in the action and learning about foreign conflicts. When he was eight and living in Egypt during the Suez War, Roeder and his mother were shot at while on a bus, trying to leave the country. "It was quite a scary and eye-opening experience—I was only eight."

When it came time for college, Roeder decided he wanted to attend one in the United States and perhaps in the Midwest. "I wanted to get a sense of what it meant and felt like to be an American and to live with everyday Americans," said Roeder. "I decided on Culver since my father had gone there."

At C-SC, Roeder began studying for a degree in history, but after a year decided to join the Army during the Vietnam War. "My country was at war and I felt like I should join one of the services to help," said Roeder. "Also, I felt like I wasn't very mature my first year at Culver; I needed to grow up."

After serving for three years, the last two in Ethiopia, Roeder returned to C-SC to continue his education. "The time off made a world of difference," said Roeder. "My grades improved dramatically and I became more focused."

After graduating, Roeder moved to Washington and got a job at the State Department working with the Bureau of Consular Affairs. He also volunteered to be a Watch Officer in Lebanon during the BAKAAA Valley Missile Crisis and in Iran

during the hostage crisis. As a Watch Officer, Roeder was in charge of a staff of officers and secretaries who monitored the crisis. He also made recommendations

for action, handled welfare and whereabouts cases, counseled distraught hostage families and fielded press requests. Roeder was sometimes forced into making hard decisions.

"When the President ordered all of the Iranian military students out, he gave them until midnight on a set date to be on their way. On the last night, one of the planes broke down. I got a call from the U.S. Marshall's Office telling me that they could only get the students out on time if they commandeered an airplane. A plane was available, but it had civilians still on board. The civilians were willing to cooperate, but for insurance reasons, the plane had to be commandeered—they had no authority to do that. A decision had to be made within 15 minutes. I remembered that the students were leaving on instructions of President Carter so I talked to the president of the airline and said that in name of the president, I intended to commandeer his plane. He said OK and the mission was successful."

In 1986, Roeder left the State Department to become a peace  
*continued on page 7*

## *Where the Action Is*

*continued from page 6*

keeping official and civil observer in the Sinai Peninsula. There he helped enforce the treaty, served as a TV anchor for the English speaking troops, studied the Bedouin tribes and, in turn, educated incoming troops about his discoveries.

"I visited all of the tribes and learned how each was different," said Roeder. "I came to know the sheik of one clan, and some even thought I would marry his daughter. I didn't, but he still made me a member of the tribe."

While in the Sinai, Roeder wrote many letters and kept a journal of his encounters. In many of his letters he wrote about the dangers that were around him. "One day (while) we were relaxing on a Fiji beach, an Egyptian helicopter came at us as though on a strafing run; but he was only having a little fun at our expense," writes Roeder. "He came at us twice, and is lucky that the Fiji troops didn't shoot him down. Things like that let us know how vulnerable we are."

Roeder remembers a particularly rewarding experience during his time in the Sinai. "Once while on patrol with Charley King, a retired U.S. Marine major, we came upon a twisted wreck of a vehicle. We landed our helicopter and found that two Bedu inside had been thrown through the windshield. We each took a victim. After stabilizing them, we radioed for an ambulance. Their lives were saved. For months after, the Bedu spoke of how the men in orange, our uniform, saved two lives. It was a great feeling."

After two years in the Middle East, Roeder returned to work at the State Department. "I would have loved to stay, but the legal limit was two years."

Since then, he has participated in

the conflict with Iraq as an advisor to the Navy and was attached to the European Community as an expert on sanctions during the Serbian conflict.

In 1994, Roeder and others began working on a computer program called Relief.Web. This program, now in prototype, will network humanitarian disaster sites through the use of personal computers and a satellite. "Imagine that you're in Africa and are driving down a dirt road," said Roeder. "You spot an unexploded mine or a refugee camp. With this program you could enter its location and description into your laptop and it is automatically linked into a satellite and can be instantly accessed by others with the program. This will aid those involved in humanitarian relief."

While working on this program, Roeder traveled to Africa to explore setting up Relief.Web. He visited displaced persons camps and refugee camps in the war zone in southern Sudan along the border of Kenya, Zaire and Uganda. There he met with rebel forces, the government and many humanitarian relief organizations. He demonstrated the prototype of the network and explained the project to make sure the design fit field needs.

"The trip was not without hazards," said Roeder. "I was robbed at gun point by the airport police in Khartoum. I also tripped out of a bus and hit my head on the runway...And while in the south, I had to fly into a forest in a small plane and land on a tiny dirt strip. These strips are sometimes laced with 'toe poppers,' small land mines designed to blow off a victim's feet."

He continues, "I was buzzed by a MIG fighter on one evening in

Yambio and on another day I had to pass through a column of over 700 troops on their way to battle ... Most of the troops were armed with modern weapons, but it was interesting to note that some were armed with bows, arrows and spears."

Roeder also had to adapt to unusual and often adverse living conditions. "I stayed in native huts and tents for the most part ... My first hut was made of mud and thatch, and except for a loose roof, was open to the sky ... At night I listened to drums being beaten, tribal music, rifle fire, and watched people dance by a fire."

Roeder, who now works with the Bureau of International Organizations as a Policy Planning Advisor, says he will continue to do what he can to reach out to other countries. "I want to use my training in crisis management to help others and try to bring good operational information to everyone."

Two more computer programs are in the works for Roeder, "GEMINI," a G-7 network linking natural disaster systems, and a second that will link the U.S. and Japan in the tracking of radiation leaks from reactors in Asia. The second should give disaster preparedness teams a more effective early warning system.

With these new programs, Roeder will surely find himself dodging bullets and land mines while trying to bring his technology to other countries.

"Never let it be said that diplomats lead boring lives."

*Larry can be contacted at his home address: 15009 Carlbern Drive, Centreville, Va. 20020-1430 or via e-mail at [Lroeder@nova.org](mailto:Lroeder@nova.org). Visit his World Wide Web home page at <http://beta.nova.org/~lroeder/roeder.htm>.*