

BERNARD LOEFFKE

As a soldier, as a scholar, as a statesman, and as a humanitarian, Major General Bernard “Burn” Loeffke has lived a life of truly selfless service. His contributions to the Academy, the United States Army, and the world community have been and continue to be extraordinary.

Born in Colombia, South America from an American Father and a Spanish Mother, Bernard Loeffke was admitted to the United States Military Academy, Class of 1957, as a Foreign Cadet and was granted US citizenship on graduation. He states, “I am a proud American and the greatest honor is simply to be called ‘an American.’ I am proud of that title and the fact that I have had the opportunity to serve a full career as a US Army Officer.”

Three and a half combat tours in Southeast Asia established the foundation of Bernard Loeffke’s military career. In combat, he led from the front. He was repeatedly decorated for gallantry in action and deeply committed to the well-being of his soldiers. As a Special Forces officer, a paratroop advisor to Vietnamese units, and later as an infantry battalion commander, he proved to be an effective and courageous leader. Rapid promotions in combat with four Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart attest to his military skill and courage under fire.

While serving in Vietnam, General Loeffke was changed by the battle death of Sgt. Larry Morford, a soldier in his battalion. Morford, though opposed to war, explained that he chose to be a soldier because “War is a beastly job and the least beastly of us should be doing it.” General Loeffke honors the memory of Sgt. Morford to this day. In particular, he has dedicated the Friendship Fund at West Point in his honor. The Fund, established in 1995, looks to inspire cadets, our future American soldier-statesmen, to increase their understanding of their Russian and Chinese colleagues.

As a diplomat in uniform, General Loeffke was the quintessential soldier-statesman. His foreign language skills and political savvy proved more than equal to the unusual challenges he faced while serving as the military attaché in Moscow during the iciest days of the Cold War and then as defense attaché in the Peoples Republic of China. He commanded at every level culminating his career as the Commanding General of US Army South. As a staff officer, he helped to develop strategic plans for the Army general staff and served in the National Security Council staff in the White House. His involvement with the Soviet Union included participation in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in Geneva Switzerland. Another important assignment was his chairmanship of the Inter-American Defense Board, and military advisor to the Secretary General of the Organization of American States. He retired as a Major General in 1992, but was recalled to serve as the Director of Task Force Russia in its mission of investigating and resolving questions regarding US POWs and MIAs in the old Soviet Union. This assignment led him to visit many labor camps in Siberia, and testify before Senate committees on his findings.

As a scholar, Bernard Loeffke earned a Master's Degree in Russian language and Soviet Area Studies and a doctorate in International Relations. He taught Russian at the United States Military Academy and US Foreign Policy at Georgetown University. He was the Army’s visiting Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. Most recently, in 1997, he earned a Physician’s Assistant Degree from Nova Southeastern University and later received the President’s Distinguished Alumni Award for his medical service in Africa. He now teaches as a visiting professor; public health, emergency medicine and mediation at two medical universities. He is fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, and French and has a working knowledge of Mandarin Chinese. He has authored several inspirational books, and he and his son are currently co-authoring a book on their experiences in China.

As a humanitarian, he continues to employ the skills he acquired in his medical training on relief missions in many of the world’s most daunting areas. On retiring from the Army, he embarked on this

new calling – that of healer – to provide medical aid to people in impoverished circumstances, often at personal risk. His medical theater of operations spans the globe. He had his first taste of missionary medicine in a combat zone in Africa. His travels have taken him to such places as Bosnia, Haiti, Iraq, Kenya, Niger, Darfur, Sudan and the Amazon jungles. His book; “Warrior to Healer”, summarizes his life’s transition. He and his children maintain a website; HOT – “www.helpingotherstoday.com” – to inspire support for worthwhile causes important to them.

One cannot know Bernard Loeffke without noting his strong commitment to physical fitness. At West Point, he lettered in both intercollegiate swimming and soccer. He was a US Army Swimming Champion as a junior officer. He believes that the first priority for soldiers is to be physically fit and lead by example. Five days before he retired, members of Company B, Third US Infantry, many of them less than half his age, joined him in one of his infamous Friday morning workouts of 100 pushups, 100 sit-ups, and a 3-mile run in 21 minutes carrying an 11-pound mock M-16 rifle. He has run marathons in China and a military type decathlon in Moscow. He has served as an Advisor to the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and continues to promote physical fitness today by personal example and authoring books on the subject.

General Bernard Loeffke has served his nation heroically in uniform during war and peace, exemplifying the principles of Duty, Honor, Country. Now, he exemplifies these same principals as a healer. He has fought; he has taught; he has cured and saved lives. He has earned the title of a distinguished graduate of West Point.

Accordingly, the Association of Graduates of the United States Military Academy takes great pride in presenting the 2007 Distinguished Graduate Award to Bernard Loeffke.