

Aaron Gewirtz--August 2020

Asian Division – 1985 – 1987

European Division – 1987 – 2013 with a side trip to Abu Dhabi

Breaking the Rules – Guam 1985 and Berlin 1990, the year after the wall came down.

Most of our colleagues will remember the early days when the only copying devices available to us were the old Mimeograph machines that produced faded, copies in that horrible purple ink.

I ran into this at my first assignment on Guam. I asked the field rep if there was some way we could gain access to a real copying machine and the answer, accompanied by a bit of a “you must be kidding” look was of course, no.

Being a businessperson, I was, and still am, very conscious of appearance and presentation whether it be a meal on a plate in a restaurant or a document for some official purpose. To me, syllabi, handouts, and exams, were documents for official purposes, and they represented not only the University of Maryland, they represented me as well.

So, I asked the Ralph Millis, the area director for Guam if I could use the services of a local copy shop and submit the cost of the copies on my expense voucher at the end of the term. In my message I made it clear that I was going to use a copy shop, and if the University would not reimburse me, I would eat the costs myself. It was worth it to me to maintain my own professional image, if not the image of my employer.

No response but, at the end of the term, I submitted the receipts and I was reimbursed.

Some time in the 90's, I was living in the Ramstein area of Germany and received a call from Monika Zwink, coordinator for seminars and Open University classes. She asked me if I would be willing to teach one of the Open University courses we were offering back then. For those who may not have taught these classes, they were offered over a two-term time frame, 18 weeks, and carried at least six credits with a couple of them

carrying nine credits. The course would meet on Saturday from 0900 to 1300, four times during the time frame. The students had about a half dozen books they had to purchase and were given additional readings. Their output consisted of three to four major papers based on the readings and any additional research they did, and a written final exam. The first meeting and the last meeting for the final exams, were mandatory; the other two were optional. I asked Monika which Open University class she had in mind and where was it located. The course was one I had done previously while with the Asian Division. The location was BERLIN! I asked if there wasn't someone who lived closer to Berlin qualified to teach the course and if I remember correctly, she said, "Why are you asking? Don't you want to go to Berlin for four weekends?" Of course, my answer was yes.

The next question I had was, how do I get to Berlin and back? I was told to check with Martie Shull who was the area director for Berlin at the time. I was told there were a few options. There was the "Troop Train", also known as the duty train. I believe one boarded in Frankfurt and would pass through East Germany to Berlin. The trip included passenger and passport checks by East German and/or Russian soldiers. I may be off on the exact time but with a few stops along the way to change from the West German to East German crew and the passport and I.D. checking the trip took close to 10-12 hours. Once again, I am not certain, but I believe one had to have orders and go through some type of short orientation, so you knew how to behave in the East German and Russian zones. I suspect these rules were eased after the wall came down and made the trip a little shorter. Nonetheless, it was still a long trip.

The second option was to drive. When I asked Marty Shull how long that would take, she told me seven hours on a good day, considerably longer on a bad day. I would be reimbursed for my mileage at whatever the going rate was at the time. I found neither of these options acceptable. I asked Marty if I could simply fly there and back and the answer was "Air travel is not authorized".

I contacted Lufthansa and discovered that there was a flight just about every hour out of Frankfurt. The round-trip fare was less than the cost of reimbursement for the mileage! There was even a free bus that ran back

and forth between Ramstein Air Base and Frankfurt Airport. I asked again if I could fly and did not get a positive response. So, with a wink of an eye I told Marty that I would drive and submit my expenses for the mileage. It was clear that I would not do that, and I didn't want to do something deceptive. Permission was finally granted for me to fly.

What's that old saying about rules being made to be broken, or at least vigorously questioned. Fortunately, we had some administrators willing to bend the rules a bit when it was appropriate and necessary, to get the job done right.

Thanks Ralph and Martie, even if you don't recall the incidents. I hope you don't retroactively get in trouble for bending the rules.

How things went on my trips to Berlin is another story that perhaps will come later.