

## UMUC LECTURERS SCALE MT. FUJI

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When I arrived at Fuchu Air Station in Tokyo, headquarters of what was then called UMUC's Far East Division in Fall, 1972, I met many new and veteran Maryland lecturers, including professor John Floyd. Because only one lecturer per academic discipline was given a teaching assignment at most military installations, and because John taught psychology and I English, we often found ourselves together on remote Air Force bases in Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, and Turkey, among others. John and I quickly became fast friends and shared many adventures over the years. After some harrowing experiences in or near war zones in Thailand (on Ubon, Udorn and U-Tapao Air Force bases), in the Summer of 1973 John and I were both teaching in cosmopolitan Tokyo and decided it was time to cross a big item off our bucket lists (though the term bucket list had not yet been coined). Eagerly absorbing Japanese culture, we learned that Mt. Fujiama was a sacred place to most Japanese and that large numbers of able-bodied Japanese citizens vowed to climb the holy mountain at least once in their lives. Ergo, in August, 1973, John and I, young strong and eager, solemnly resolved to make the ascent.

In our BOQ rooms at Fuchu Air Station, we packed cameras, raincoats, extra pairs of white socks, cans of Chicken O' the Sea tuna, plenty of yen, and set out on our great adventure. The idea was to begin the ascent at dusk, so as to reach the summit at sunrise (Land of the Rising Sun, you know).

We started climbing at Level 5. Getting that far was easy since Level 5 was where the bus from Fuchu let us off. At a cozy climbing station we each bought a traditional Fuji hiking pole (Y 300), a Jiffy Fuji Flashlight (Y 400), got pointed in the right direction (up), and on a clear star-lit night with the Marylander spirit of adventure, we set out. We easily gained Level 6-- it was mostly downhill. Then for the first time we got a good look at the mountain: it was dark, imposing, shrouded in clouds, and almost 13,000 feet high. Furthermore, we weren't alone that night. It was the height of the Summer climbing season and we immediately spied a trail of flickering lights bending up the mountain as far as we could see. In a large supply store we got our hiking poles branded in Kanji, which translated to "Level 6, Mt. Fuji" (Y 50) and began climbing in earnest. We quickly passed many fellow hikers as we reached Level 7 (about 9,000 ft.), then stopped for beers (Y 350). The terrain, we now noticed, was becoming severely steeper, the air was growing chill, and the wind was beginning to blow. Halfway to Level 8 we rested, ate cans of tuna for energy, and pressed on. At level 7.7 we stopped for fresh flashlight batteries (Y 200), beers (now Y 500), and became concerned as it started to drizzle. At a comfort hut on Level 8, we switched to sake (Y 550), had a strategic conference and decided to alter our original plan of reaching the summit without rest. At about 5 a.m. we humbly rented damp tatami mats (Y 750) and caught an hour and a half of blissful, if clammy, sleep.

Before 7 a.m. we were awakened by the splatter of rainfall on our corrugated tin shed. Grumpily we ate more tuna, drank more sake, donned our raincoats, and set out against the elements. After being passed by a woman carrying a baby (she looked **very** strong), we finally made it to the summit which was euphemistically dubbed "Level 10." Triumphantlly we peered into the famous crater: it looked like the inside of a cloud. We took lots of pictures, saw scattered hats, umbrellas, hiking poles, backpacks, empty tuna cans, and other debris pockmarking the crater. Finally we backed off, fearing that the wind might blow us into the curved shadow below the rim. We dutifully got our hiking poles branded (Y 950),

bought Japanese Sunburst Flags to attach to our poles (¥ 1,000), made contributions to the Buddhist shrine at the summit, got pointed in the right direction (down), and began our descent.

The return trip was surprisingly easy. The trail along a mile-wide stretch of soft volcanic ash known as "The Slide" allowed us to literally dirt-ski most of the way down. We arrived at the bus station near Level 5 damp, filthy, exhausted and still slightly drunk. My white sneakers and socks had turned coal black, and we still had Fuji dirt under our fingernails even after several showers back at Fuchu Air Station.

In later years John went on to become a UMUC Area Director and did pioneering work in distance education, now a staple of the UMGC world-class curriculum. Years later at my 50th college reunion, when I was asked to sit for an oral history interview, it dawned on me that there had to be a treasure trove of stories that UMUC lecturers would be happy to tell about unusual assignments they had had in exotic locals and sometimes in war zones around the world. Therefore, beginning in 2014, at each OMA gathering I began interviewing UMUC lecturers who were eager to tell their unique stories. To date I have accumulated more than three dozen interviews, including two that I will always cherish by two UMUC legends: the late Benjamin Massey and the late Ellie Seidel. DVDs of most of the interviews are now housed in the UMWC archives at Largo, Maryland.

My dear friend John Floyd is no longer with us, but for many years after crossing Fuji off our bucket lists, John and I continued to reminisce about our great trek. Furthermore, it is a comfort to know that, presumably, Dr. Floyd died with his hiking boots off.

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Mt. Fuji-on The Slide, on the way down in the rain



With John Floyd in hut on Fuji. Our Japanese sunburst flags with brands from each level of the climb are prized possessions