

## **Making it by car to my UMUC assignment in West Berlin through the Soviet sector of East Germany, 1969**

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The time was December 1968. The place was Seville, Spain where I was about to finish two fall terms, which were given to me as a “honeymoon assignment” by UMUC. I received my new assignment in mid-December, two spring terms in West Berlin, Germany. The schedule back then started the new academic year in late August and ran Term 2 a week past Christmas into the New Year. My young wife was halfway through the third trimester of pregnancy. We wanted to fly to Heidelberg, but no airline would allow her to fly when she was that pregnant. I could not leave her alone in Seville. So, after getting permission from Heidelberg and 100% of my students to meet during Christmas week, I packed up the VW in late December and drove straight through to Heidelberg, stopping only when necessary.

With my wife so pregnant, the only way to get her to West Berlin was by train or drive through East Germany on an autobahn that was open to American and allied traffic by treaty. (As most people know, after the war Germany was divided into 4 occupied sectors: American, British, and French on the west and the Soviet sector on the east. The city of Berlin, surrounded by Soviet East Germany, was similarly divided.)

We chose to drive so I would have a car for my commute within Berlin. The Soviets and East Germans had to approve every vehicle that used that corridor, and they made it as difficult as possible. This was just 20 years after the famous Berlin Airlift of 1947-48, in which the Soviets and East Germans blockaded all land, rail, and water routes to West Berlin in an attempt to starve the West Berliners into leaving. The allies responded by flying in supplies to the West Berliners. Day and night planes landed every 30 seconds carrying tons of supplies, 278,288 flights in two years. After several planes crashed killing crew members as well as civilians on the ground, the allies put their foot down and began pressuring the Soviets to open the land corridors. The Soviets did not want to go to war with western superpowers, one of which had nuclear weapons. Finally the Soviets realized they were losing world prestige to western hero pilots, and they opened the autobahn and rail line to western traffic. But tensions were still very high.

I was required to go through a military training session and briefing on how to handle various situations or emergencies while traveling the corridor into Berlin. We were instructed never to exit our vehicle under any circumstances. If we had an accident or broke down, we were instructed to remain in our car until a US military patrol came by, which they did every half hour. There was little chance of an accident since we saw almost no other vehicles on the autobahn, just an occasional allied or Soviet military vehicle. But a breakdown in my old VW was a possibility.

I could have sent my wife in by rail, but neither of us wanted to be apart if a sudden emergency arose with her pregnancy. And, since I had taken the train once, before we were married, I felt she would be more comfortable in the car. I could have left her in Hamburg with her parents,

where her stepfather was a USAF colonel, decorated for flights over North Vietnam, before becoming the USAF liaison officer to the German government. But if we chose that path, I would be apart from my new wife, and I could not be there for the birth of my child in February. Besides, my wife was an adventuresome type and wanted to go through the East German corridor. An additional reason for not taking the train was that my assignment was a split taking me from Brigade all the way across West Berlin to Tempelhof air station, and I wanted my car to drive the split.

In the briefing I was told that my papers would have to be absolutely perfect and handed to the Soviet officer in a certain order that was not always clear. Also a certain protocol was called for...clean shave, nice shirt and jacket, no gum chewing. But the American officer told me the easiest way to ensure I didn't encounter any problems was to place a nice new *Playboy* magazine on the bottom of my stack of papers. And by damn that worked! The officer let us through with a smile and no hassle and instructed a junior officer to escort us to our car.

The trip to West Berlin was hassle free. I can't remember how long it took, but I'm sure it was under 5 hours. On reaching West Berlin, we checked out at the Soviet checkpoint almost exactly the time expected and into West Berlin through the allied checkpoint. Then we found and checked into our military quarters and began our new life in Berlin. Our son was born two months later, on February 28, in an excellent German hospital. Both of his parents were American, so he became an American citizen automatically, with the right to become a German citizen at age 21.

I helped with the delivery of our son, first time that was ever allowed in that hospital I was told. The next night I walked into my classroom and wrote on the board in capital letters, "B O Y". Of course that elicited a round of applause. I began to pass out cigars to my male students. When I came to the only female student in the class, I said, "Oh, what the hell" and handed her a cigar which she graciously took.

I don't remember a lot about the students I had in Berlin. The one I remember most was an Army Lieutenant Colonel probably 15 years older than me. Yes, back then, unlike today, you occasionally came across an officer who didn't have a degree. I had several captains and majors during my 4 years in the ED in the mid to late 1960s, but only one Lt. Col. Some of them got field commissions in Vietnam, and I suspect this colonel did too. He was an African-American, the best student in the class by far, and I didn't cut him any slack because of his rank. He never held his rank over my punk-kid head. He never missed a class and engaged me more than most students in my career. The paper he wrote in the class was brilliant.

Our time in Berlin was peaceful and enjoyable with our new son. When we left West Berlin, we drove again through the autobahn corridor without incident following the same procedures. We were old pros by this time, having visited East Berlin through Checkpoint Charlie several times. The same procedures were followed on leaving as when coming...*Playboy* on bottom of travel documents, the whole scam. We arrived at my new assignment, a Wiesbaden-Mannheim split and checked into our new quarters in the American Arms Hotel, Wiesbaden.

We left the ED that summer. I had been offered a 5th year, but all along the administration had emphasized a 4-year limit, and I believed them. I had arranged to go back to grad school at USC in Los Angeles to finish my Ph.D. I eventually did get my degree at USC, in an ironic twist, but that's another story.

(NOTE: I joined UMUC's European Division in August 1965 with only a master's degree and one year of full-time teaching under my belt, teaching economics, finance, accounting, and various business and math/statistics classes. I walked into my first UMUC classroom in Athens at the age of 23, though I would turn 24 a few weeks later. I taught exactly--almost to the day--4 years before returning to the States in 1969 to get my PhD. I spent the next 24 years building a career and raising a son, mostly in California. Then CA offered a "Golden Handshake" early retirement program that only required that the participant be 50 years old and have 5 years in the system. I had one year to make the decision, but they extended it to two. I thought long and hard about my tough decision because I was at the top of my game. But the CA offer was too good to turn down (hundreds took it), and my offer from UMUC included teaching graduate courses in the new master's program in Europe. Divorced, son grown and on his own, I gave up a truly wonderful life in Marin County north of San Francisco. With a monthly pension and free medical, dental, and vision insurance for life, I took the "Golden Handshake" and returned to UMUC Europe in August 1993. I spent the next 21 years with UMUC in Europe and Asia making my tenure for two tours exactly 25 years, almost to the day. I took the retirement bonus from UMUC in 2014. In my 25 years with UMUC I amassed hundreds of experiences similar to this one--teaching at a spy base in northern Pakistan (from where Gary Powers took off on his ill-fated flight), teaching under war conditions in Bosnia, teaching in China, and 40 other places in 15 countries--but my best experiences were during term breaks from the classroom and have little to do with the true UMUC teaching experience, except that UMUC put me in a position to have them. For that I am eternally grateful. I wrote volumes of notes on the many experiences made possible by UMUC, which I may put together into a book at some point.)