

## Incident at Arnhem Station

Charles J. Krumbein  
January 2024

One of the best side benefits of working on the UMUC circuit had to be the opportunity for international travel during the extended weekends and also between terms. I have recounted a number of such memorable travel ventures in my previous memoirs, as have many of my former colleagues on this Memoirs Project. For me, the occasions that were fraught with the highest degree of trepidation so often involved border crossings. In leaving behind a country where one was employed as a teacher and going to a different one for a short vacation, any number of problems can arise. (In one of my previous memoirs entitled “You Can’t Go Home Again,” I described what had happened to a couple of young American girls that I met at a cafe in Adana, Turkey, when they had attempted to cross the border into Turkey in a couple of VW mini-buses.) The most serious border-crossing incident that happened to me occurred when I flew from Asmara in Ethiopia and landed in Khartoum. In walking from the baggage checkpoint to the airport exit, blithely following the rest of my tour group, I had a military-dressed guard suddenly move in front of me, block my exit, cock his rifle, and point it directly at my astonished face. Why this event even happened I shall teasingly leave for a possible future memoir.

A less severe incident took place for me in 1972 when I was teaching at Bad Kreuznach and doing the dreaded “splits” to the army tank base at Baumholder. On this occasion, I chose to go to Amsterdam as my weekend retreat. To get from Germany to the Netherlands on the train, the place where I crossed the border was Arnhem Station. It was there, when the border guards on the train got a look at my passport, that I was summarily ordered to pick up my one bag and to accompany them off the train. I was still using my top-secret passport with the red cover and because of all of my previous travels to such exotic places as the afore-mentioned Khartoum, along with having a visa for Djibouti, one more for Yemen, and stamps from Turkey, Teheran, Beirut, Jiddah and even Israel, that added to the unfortunate timing of my trip, I guess that I was looked at as being a very suspicious character. The day of my travel was Friday, October 20. Just a few days prior in the Netherlands, on October 17-18, 1972, some terrorists had planted several bombs: one under a car in Eindhoven, one in front of a Bank of America branch in Rotterdam, another in front of an insurance company in Utrecht, and a final one in front of a Holiday Inn hotel in Utrecht. Understandably, the authorities were on edge and on the lookout for anyone who seemed to be suspicious in the slightest way. So I was detained in the station, my one bag was thoroughly searched, and I was patted down just in case. I was let go and had to board the next train going through to Amsterdam about an hour later. However, I was also told explicitly that I could only stay in the Netherlands for two days until Sunday, and that I was absolutely to leave by then. That was alright with me as I had to be back in Germany to teach on Monday night anyway. But it did make for a scary situation nonetheless.

As it turned out, that delay at Arnhem Station ended up being rather fortuitous. I stowed my one bag in the train station, walked out the front of the building, crossed the various tram tracks, and began my walk up the Damrak away from the station. I was just looking to get a bite to eat at one of the street stands when there, coming towards me, was a familiar head on a six-foot, four-inch body, bobbing blissfully above the much shorter Dutch citizenry. It was none other than an ex-Army buddy named Tom Horton. (Tom was also involved in the infamous

cheetah caper to Djibouti that I described in my earlier memoir entitled “To Djibouti and Beyond.”) He was as shocked to see me there on the Damrak as I was to encounter him. It turned out that he was in the Netherlands visiting the family of a student that his own family had hosted back in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1963 as part of a high-school exchange program. This student, named Willy, was taking a class in Amsterdam and had brought Tom into town to take in the sights while she was at class. Her family lived in Hilversum. Therefore, my delay in getting into Amsterdam worked out as I got to meet up with an old friend and then ended up spending a night and sharing meals with his host family as well. None of that would have happened had I not been forced off the train by passport control and then gotten to Amsterdam on a later train.

Sometimes one can cross a border and encounter problems without even realizing it. Take for instance the time when I and another military buddy named Donald Chester from Clarksville, Tennessee, were on break from Kagnev Station and relaxing in steamy Massawa on the Red Sea. (At this time in 1968, I was still serving in the U.S. Army and was also concurrently employed part-time as a UMUC English instructor in Ethiopia.) We decided to leave the American resort hotel and walk across the long causeway into the main town. We had both made that walk many times before. However, on this one occasion, we decided to stroll over to the port area and to take a closer look at the huge cargo ships from many foreign countries that were docked there. The docks were only a few hundred yards from where we had walked so often in the past that we did not even consider that we were breaking any rules. But it turned out that after taking a good long look at the ships, we just turned to go back into the main part of town. It was there that we were stopped by two guards armed with menacing rifles and had our way blocked. Without thinking, we had suddenly become like any two sailors who had walked off a foreign ship and were trying to visit the town. Apparently we had not been observed by these two guards when we left the main town to check out the ships. Now we were attempting to cross a sort of invisible border and were halted in our tracks. We did not have our passports with us as they were left back in Asmara in our barracks. Neither of us spoke Tigrinya, the local language used by the guards. After some very anxious moments when it appeared that we were not going to be allowed to return to the American resort hotel, we were made to understand that they wanted to see our identification. Luckily, in our wallets we did have what were called Ethiopian ID cards, a piece of green plastic with official writing, the colors of the Ethiopian flag on the border, and our photographs smack in the center, that were issued to all American military personnel at Kagnev Station. Had we not carried those items, it may have led to some kind of international incident. (As it turned out, that was the only time for me that that ID card was ever needed.) On all of our future visits to Massawa over the next couple of years, we resisted any foolish temptation to check out what giant ships were docked in the port.

In any case, I trust that all of my UMUC colleagues who have access to the Memoirs Project have had similar scary moments happen to them when attempting border crossings. Some were likely to have ended up being much more serious in their consequences than the ones I have just described. Border personnel do not take kindly to any suspicious characters or activities. In all of these incidents presented here, I thought that I was completely innocent, sometimes just blithely strolling where I was not supposed to be, and sometimes just a victim of political circumstances of which I was completely unaware, as happened at Arnhem Station. Such was the life of a vagabond Marylander back in the glory days: a university teacher one day and, if not a James Bond, then at least an “Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery” the next. Certainly now in retrospect, that is what I am allowing my fantasy life to imagine.