

## **“That’s the Fact, MAC!”**

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One of the distinct privileges of signing on with UMUC is the opportunity to use the free MAC (Military Airlift Command) flights both between assignments and even on the long weekends with breaks of almost four days. On one of those long weekends, I was able in early 1972 to escort my newly pregnant wife Toni from Adana AFB where I was teaching back down to her home in Asmara, Ethiopia, which was the site of Kagnew Station. That way she could be with her parents instead of being isolated in Turkey. Because of my status as English teacher, that also gave her access to the hospital and medical facilities on the African base. On other short hops, I was able to visit the late Dr. Bill Berglof and his wife Atsuko in Izmir where he was teaching (and also to tour the nearby archaeological site of Ephesus); or I could just go back to my favorite spot on the planet at the time, Athens, for a little R&R while enjoying that culture. Of course, if the flights back did not align favorably, I was stuck paying for a commercial flight to get back in time for my Monday teaching duties. But that was a small price to pay in return for flying for free between countries and even continents. I am sure that all of my fellow Marylanders used that wonderful service to their advantage as well.

However, on two significant occasions during my tenure with UMUC, my free flights were not just of the short-range variety. In one such instance, I was sent on emergency leave while teaching at Karamursel Air Station in 1973 due to the passing of my father back home in Wisconsin. The date was June 23, a Saturday night that started in Istanbul at the Perapalas Hoteli. I had retired to my room after a long day shopping in the *Kapalıçarşı*, the Grand Bazaar, and also touring Topkapi. That hotel has been popular with many Marylanders, as well as having served famous celebrities like Agatha Christie, Ernest Hemingway and even Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, the former president of Turkey who had Room 101 overlooking the Golden Horn. On that evening, Dr. Joe Arden happened to be staying there as well. Some time after midnight, he knocked on my door and gave me the sad news that my father had died. He helped me check out and sent me down to the Galata Bridge where I caught the ferry back to Yalova and then a taxi back to Karamursel. He even called ahead to have orders ready for my MAC flights home on emergency leave.

I threw a suitcase together and caught a flight on Sunday morning to Adana AFB, from which I could get better transportation back to the States. I only had to wait a few hours before a C-141 was leaving for Torrejon AFB outside of Madrid. Another layover there of about six hours made me start to get nervous, but when one is on emergency leave, that person gets first shot on the next plane out. There was a slight delay when the plane was getting ready as the E4-striped airman behind the desk insisted that I needed to get a haircut before I could board the flight. Perhaps it

was due to my still wearing the obvious military-issue, black-rimmed glasses that caused his unwavering first impression. Apparently he had not read my orders very closely, so when I refused and he made another demand, I pointed out that not only was I on emergency leave but that I was also a GS12 civilian. At that point, he sheepishly slunk back into an interior room and one of his co-workers bearing E5 stripes came out and got me ready to go. I also discovered that my emergency status had bumped a full-bird colonel's son who was left back at the terminal in Spain, guitar in hand. I did, however, first have to sign a waiver saying that I was willing to fly to Charleston, South Carolina, with human remains on board. I readily signed off and was soon on my way back to the USA via a giant C5A while sitting in one of those troop seats across from a stars-and-stripes draped coffin.

By Monday afternoon, I was in Charleston AFB and only had to catch a civilian commercial flight to Chicago O'Hare and then a transfer taking me up to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where my Uncle Mel and Aunt Sally Wolverton drove me down to Fond du Lac in time for the funeral on Tuesday. I stayed with my family until Friday, when it was time to make my jet-lagged return to Turkey. That is when I ended up on one of the most bizarre set of MAC flights that I have ever experienced. The commercial part was fairly straightforward: Oshkosh back to Chicago and then over to Philadelphia where I caught a military bus to Dover AFB. I stayed in a barracks for two nights as there were no flights going back to Europe over the weekend. At this point, I was getting concerned as I still had two delayed classes to finish when I got back to Karamursel, which from Dover seemed now to be ever so far away. Finally, on Monday afternoon, there was a flight which consisted of a group of Air Force Reserve officers and enlisted men who needed to log flight time to keep their status secured. There was another flight leaving for Germany about six hours later, but my anxiety had reached a point where I wanted out on the first available plane. Little did I know what I was in for when I decided to join them instead of awaiting that other later flight.

My first clue should have been that the aircraft was a C130 double-prop plane. Its first scheduled destination was Goose Bay, Labrador. But, as I soon discovered, these rather carefree Air Force Reserve-striped personnel were not about to do anything on schedule. We did not leave Dover until almost three hours later than posted due to the casual arrival of the colonel who was the head honcho in charge of this group. Then, within just two hours out of Dover, I was already beginning to regret my hasty decision. This crew unanimously decided that they had done enough flying for one day and so we landed at night, unannounced, at Loring AFB in Caribou, Maine. Of course, that decision was not conveyed to the personnel at Caribou, who were just flummoxed by a completely unscheduled arrival of a C130. The only available accommodations for us were a base rec room with a scattering of armchairs and couches. My sleep, if I got any, was fitful at best. We were awakened at 9:30 the next morning by a few striped airmen loudly entering our "bedroom" to use its ping-pong and pool tables. My sore back seemed to be in keeping with those of the rest of our crew if all of the grunting and stretching were any evidence. When

we asked for directions to the mess hall, we were then informed that it had closed a half hour ago and would not reopen until 11:30. The best they could do for us was box lunches, unless we chose to wait two hours. So a load of white cartons with ham and cheese sandwiches, an apple, a banana, some fruit drink in one of those pouches with an attached straw, and a candy bar were what this disgruntled group left with.

The long flight up to Goose Bay RCAF seemed interminable on the prop-driven C130. It lasted at least nine hours, but with a bad back doubled over into those troop seats, it was as if the plane may as well have been nicknamed *Dante's Inferno*. Even though it was late June, the air on the tarmac in Labrador felt like it was still January. But at least the accommodations were comfortable in the Royal Canadian barracks, and the food was practically gourmet after those measly box lunches. We got a proper wake-up call at seven am and the shower did wonders for my aching anatomy. When we got ready to depart after breakfast, the colonel issued an order to the mess hall that we were not going to have any "blankety-blank" box lunches for the long flight across the Atlantic. I cannot say for certain what our altitude on that flight was, but I do remember distinctly being able to watch the Atlantic waters below us crawl along in waves. When we arrived at Mildenhall AFB in England, it was about five pm local time. The colonel announced that we were going to be there for a full day, so I inquired about train travel into London. When I got to the small nearby platform at Leamington Spa, there was the whole crew headed into London as well!

Given that it was only my second time in the UK, I was not familiar with train ticketing. I found no window available to buy a ticket, so I figured I could just get one on the train. However, all the way into Marylebone Station, no conductor came around. A bit sheepishly, I walked out of the station having not paid the fare. I then checked the board for the last train departing for Leamington Spa and made my way to central London. There was not much time to do anything except walk around Piccadilly Circus, make my way over to Trafalgar Square, give a gander to Big Ben in the distance, and grab a bite to eat. On the return trip, I did pay for the ticket and got back to Mildenhall AFB, along with the whole crew who were on the train again. Sleep came easily that night at the air base. After a hearty breakfast, the C130 departed for Wiesbaden, which took only about three and a half hours. When I heard that the crew was not going on to Naples as scheduled, because the colonel was under orders from his wife to go to Munich to buy a couple of cases of a special wine, I figured it was now time to leave these striped military characters and make my own civilian way back down to Turkey.

So I bought a commercial ticket to Athens, caught a flight from there to Yesilkoy in Istanbul, and found a bus that made the long ride around the Sea of Marmara and dropped me off at Karamursel. I had been gone two weeks, but needed all day Sunday to recover. Early Monday morning, I checked in at the Ed Center to advise them to contact all of my students and spent the next couple of weeks finishing the term late. MAC may not always be the most convenient means of travel, but the price cannot be beat. All in all, that's my "Stripes" story, and I'm sticking to it.

ADDENDUM: This month of June 2023 marks the 50th since that day of June 22, 1973, when my father passed away while I was teaching for UMUC at Karamursel. By some eerie means, on that exact same day forty-two years later, June 22, 2015, my mother also passed away. She left us at 3:16 in the afternoon at a nursing home in my home town of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, while I was in the room with her. I noted the time of passing in order to let the hospital officials have that information for the death certificate. Then, while I was preparing to speak at the eulogy for my mother, that noted time struck me as odd. After thinking about it, it occurred to me why that was the case. I am sure that many of you have seen football games or baseball games broadcast on television where someone is holding up a sign that reads: "JOHN 3:16". That sign refers to a particular New Testament Biblical quote: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." When I delivered my eulogy, I incorporated that message into my presentation, given that my mother was a deeply religious and practicing Roman Catholic for all of her 95 years of life. It seemed to us gathered in that room and knowing what that day was and what it meant to our family, that my father was calling his wife to his side. The matching plaques on the grave which are shown below have caused more than one person to remark on this odd conjunction of dates so many years apart. Our remaining family still gathers in memory of our beloved parents on that day, and we will do so once more come June 22 of this year.



