

Maryland's Impact on My Life

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My experiences with Maryland have impacted my life in many ways, as I am sure it has affected other members of our Maryland cohort. Whenever I deliberately think about those experiences, I am surprised at the impact they have had on my life. Remarkably, I never noticed how often I have said “when I was with Maryland” over the nearly three decades since I left Asia.

My references and connections to Maryland started as soon as I returned to the United States. I left Korea in 1993 and went to the University of Missouri to pursue my Ph.D. My field of study was the history of the American West, but my minor area of specialization was Modern East Asia. I was able to combine my studies in the American West with Asian history by writing a dissertation about Chinese opium dens in the nineteenth century American West (that eventually became a book). While I did not teach in China yet made many visits to Hong Kong both during and after Maryland, I felt comfortable writing about those who visited the dens, the people who worked in the dens, and the efforts to close them. My links between my dissertation research and the old opium dens resulted from my experiences during my last assignment in Korea at Camp Casey in the Western Corridor. I lived and taught there for only a term, but it taught me much about the seamier side of life off-base.

During that term at Casey, soldiers taking part in Operation Team Spirit filled all the good hotels and short-term lodgings in the area. As a result, with the help of a former student from Camp Carroll who had transferred to Casey, we found an interesting place for me to live. It was a hotel that catered to those who used the rooms by the hour, making payday weekend a busy time indeed. Yes, it was a brothel, although regular hotel patrons stayed there as well.

Despite that, the people who worked at the establishment were kind and I felt safe. My room was 8' x 8' and the bed took up most of the space. There was a mirror on the wall that extended from the headboard to the end of the bed. Once, when I woke up in the middle of the night, I thought I saw someone sleeping next to me, but suddenly realized I had seen my own reflection in the mirror! I also learned that the red light above my bed was easy on the eyes when I needed to get up in the middle of the night. Those experiences came back to me as I read the historical records, diaries, and contemporary newspapers about the opium dens and the brothels in the American West. I felt closer to the women in the newspaper stories of the 1850s-1880s than I ever would have felt had I not lived in the that hotel and made friends with those who worked there.

In the late 1990s, I bought a book written by some Christian missionaries that contained hundreds of photos of the areas just outside American military bases in Asia. The authors complained that the soldiers were a bad influence on the local female population encouraging the women to become prostitutes. As I read through the book and looked at the photos, I found a picture of a woman whom the author identified as a prostitute. I recognized the woman he pointed out and knew that she ran a small gift shop near the main entrance of Camp Casey. So, that cast some doubt on his account. However, that does not mean that she did not have a “side business,” but it made me question the full validity of the book. I have pointed that problem out to my students (when appropriate, of course) noting that we must be careful of what we read and how we understand the content.

In 1998, my Asian history professor at Missouri gave me a book, *Jade Lady Burning* by Martin Limón (who took many Korean language courses with Maryland and now has at least fourteen novels, many influenced by his experiences in Korea). The book is about American

soldiers stationed at Yongsan. For the first half of the novel, I could literally follow the main character block after block as I had come to know Itaewon and Seoul so well. I also think I may have had Limón in my class, as his name is familiar to me, but my gradebooks no longer exist so I cannot check.

My experiences at Misawa, where I taught three different times between 1987 and 1991, resulted in long lasting relationships because of Jeff Cheek, the outstanding ESO at Misawa. (In fact, I spoke to his widow shortly before I wrote this essay.) Jeff introduced me to many local Japanese educators. Many of them have remained my friends over the decades since. One of them now is a professor at Hachinohe Institute of Technology (HIT) and another is a retired Aomori high school teacher. Because of those associations begun during my Maryland days, I have been a guest lecturer several times at HIT and at Aomori high school. I remain close friends with both and we email regularly. Further, I also have the privilege in assisting my HIT friend in translations of Japanese documents.

I have taught at Missouri University of Science and Technology (S&T) for over twenty years, but only recently has the number of veterans increased. Because my syllabus notes that I used to teach for the Maryland program, many of the veterans come to me to ask about which military credits will transfer to S&T's degree programs. Hence, I discovered that my training in academic advising under Emory Trosper's group continues to pay off. Honestly, I am surprised at how much I remember about the advising rules. Now, I regularly attend sessions about veterans and have kept up with the rules about transfer credits. While most of our veterans have experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq but not East Asia, the acceptability of their military training credits remains largely the same.

Another impact of Maryland on my life has been the development of a new course for S&T, the History of the American Pacific. I discuss Guam, American Samoa, Hawai`i, among other places. During my Maryland years, I taught courses on Guam twice and was the first to teach on Kwajalein and Roi Namur, so my familiarity with the region is greater than many. At S&T, I have had students from the region: one was a young man from Palau (who competed in the 2016 and 2021 [2020] Olympics) and another came from American Samoa. I was lucky enough to go to American Samoa to do some research and my Maryland experiences made it easier to conduct research there as they knew that I was not “just a tourist” on their islands because I understood much of their culture and history.

My research in American Samoa was about Capt. Benjamin Franklin Tilley, the first United States Navy commander of the American Territory starting in 1900. As a result of my research, I have given many conference papers at the United States Naval Academy. Those talks led to a conference participant meeting me at his hotel to give me the ships’ logs that Capt. Tilley and Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan, father of the modern United States Navy, maintained during their various tours of duty. I have since donated them to the Naval Academy’s Archives.

Recently, one of the most interesting outcomes of my talks at the Academy and my links with Maryland was an email I received in spring 2021 from one of the historians at the Naval Historical Foundation. He wanted to know if I would give the keynote address to a reunion group meeting in St. Louis in fall 2021. I said I would be delighted. The men are veterans from the ship U.S.S. *Richard B. Anderson*. I immediately looked up the vessel and read about the ship’s namesake. He was a Marine in World War II who saved his unit on Roi (just north of Kwajalein and now called Roi Namur) by curling around a hand grenade that exploded killing Anderson but saving his comrades. As soon as I discovered the details of that action in the

region, I could not help but think of Maryland again. I was the first Marylander to teach on Roi Namur and now I was being asked to talk to a group associated with that tiny atoll in the middle of the Pacific. The gentleman at that historical foundation did not know my relationship to Roi Namur prior to his contacting me. What are the chances of finding people who have heard of the atoll, let alone taught and even spent the night there. There are a few of us, and I am convinced that many of them are Marylanders.

These are but a few of the impacts Maryland has had on my life. Some are subtle influences and others are more powerful. Some I keep to myself, while others I often share. When I meet people who have lived in Asia, I always ask them if they know X or Y. It is true, you just never know when the world becomes a very small place. Maryland has given me many experiences and adventures. It continues to influence my life in ways that I never realized would happen.



Spring 1988, Bunker on Roi Namur



April 1988, Kwajalein. I injured my knee while practicing karate. Finally, got a new knee in 2012.