

## Block Filling and New Career Challenges: Europe, 1993-1997

Forrest Studebaker—July 2020

*"Hi, this is Joe Arden in Heidelberg. Give me a call."* This was a familiar start to many of us 'seasoned' Overseas Marylanders. On this occasion, it was recorded on my answering machine in Carmel, California, after I had spent the Fourth of July, 1993 in Alexandria, Virginia. My trip East had been to follow up on a possible Peace Corps assignment facilitated by a friend in the State Department African Desk. My mind was already made up to leave Carmel and my 500 square foot apartment in earshot of the Pacific Ocean. I was scraping by as a Term lecturer at two local graduate schools, and at the Vincennes extension program geared toward soldiers at Fort Ord.

My Graduate students were privileged, as is Carmel. My Army 11 Bravos were not. But they absorbed new ideas with a hunger and enthusiasm not common among graduate students. Political conflict (Cheney-Panetta) led to demobilizing the Seventh Infantry Division (Light), and 'RIF' confronted many 'common' soldiers. The Army had promised them in-service educational opportunities, but they were deployed constantly. They shared motivation to get ahead, they realized that the Army had offered them benefits and promotions. They were great, but Army was downsizing. My employment options around Monterey were few. Hence, my search for an overseas Peace Corps stint, or a 'return' to DC after a 20 years hiatus.

So, Joe had called. We connected on 10 July, *"Have you thought of coming back to Europe Forrest?" "Yes, and the answer is **No!**"* Joe then gave me a ten-minute sales pitch on the need for PhDs to teach in Maryland's recent acquisition of consolidated graduate programs and: *"Oh, and it's an annual appointment, with benefits."* So my "No" transitioned into my arrival in Heidelberg in mid-August.

The 'new' Graduate Program was primarily MBA and MPA, with a slight fringe of MIS. My qualifications were largely in Public Policy, and some ancillary undergraduate courses in Government, and Business. My two caveats were, *"I don't want to teach in the UK, or in Germany."* My London PhD had been awarded in 1990 and the cost of living in the UK was through the roof. My last DOD overseas tour in Germany had been from 1979-1985. *"No problem; lots of options."*

Joe Shapiro briefed me to go to Geilenkirchen and Holland, new turf for me. And then we'll see. My recon visit revealed that the ESO--a student in a program Maryland had absorbed--was not welcoming. More so, they needed MIS, not MPS. After a bit of discussion I was assigned to Ramstein-Landstuhl to teach. As many of you know, that area is more American than German, but still Germany. My offer to return to CONUS and continue my DC search elicited. *"Wait a term."* We'll work something out, and so in January '94 I was off to Izmir and Adana. *"There's a direct flight,"* and so there was; **once**. I taught at /Incirlik for 10-12 days and then flew alternate weekends-via Istanbul back to Izmir. Turkey was great, but the flight from Eastern Turkey to Mediterranean Izmir was a culture shock. I never did see Istanbul; just the Airport. But I drank a lot of tea and Turkish beer with Kurdish merchants. Italy came next, and it was also great.

The Graduate Program filled a DOD need. Many of my students - typically 03's & 04's - filled a

promotion block. Often the best students were family members, or senior NCOs. Motivated,

dedicated, and reassuring. Despite Clinton's "Wag the Dog," and Impeachment follies there was cultural relief. There was Italy; Aviano, Livorno, and Vicenza. The latter brought me back to lots of 11 Bravos on five week Airborne cycles. It was a lot like Fort Ord, but with less expensive off post food, and many cultural attractions. I lived in a small Italian city, with local neighbors and learned to speak Italian moderately well. My driving took a decidedly Italian high speed form.

Was it a fit for me, or for Maryland? For the latter, I believe so. my prior enlisted experience as a UMUC student probably didn't suffer excuses from an Air Force Captain that "*Professor, I've got full time job.*" Oh, sorry, I forgot, when you were an Air Force Academy cadet, you were a full time student. Prolonged exposure to non-traditional students can really shape a faculty member's attitude. There were rare graduate students, an F-16 pilot who made major. He . started with me at Ramstein, and again when his squadron moved to Aviano. Some of the senior NCOs had done their B.A.'s with UMUC, and a lot of the family members were dedicated.

As to "block filling," that isn't unique to any one School or program. But it wasn't a match for me. I left early, via Iceland (*Fire and Ice*), and eventually reentered teaching in an upwardly mobile Community College program, and a SUNY campus with a large inner city inflow. The Graduate Tour gave me a lot of great travel opportunities, and some unique cultural experiences. It was almost certainly better than returning to DC would ever have been. Just as some PhDs and tenured faculty don't like to teach first year undergraduates, those same students should get early exposure to experienced faculty. University tenure compels research; university teaching requires different skills to teach entry-level undergraduates. It's important to know which block to fill, and with whom.