

My First 20 Years With the European Division

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It was early March, 1968 and I was nineteen years old. I carefully dressed in a little dark blue suit (naturally mini-skirted—it was 1968, after all) and set off for my interview at the University of Maryland's European Division offices in Zengerstrasse in Heidelberg, donning my white cotton gloves (they might get dirty) shortly before the interview. The job in question had the title of "Assistant Secretary to the Director." I was fresh from a two year Ordinary National Diploma in Business Studies course in England, during which I had dutifully acquired, along with accounting, economics, business fundamentals, the secondary, although at that time considered necessary, skills of shorthand and typewriting, both of which were required for this particular position. Apparently, these skills were in short supply in the Heidelberg area at the time because within a week, I was employed. My first salary was \$221.00 a month.

And that is how, on March 21, 1968, my 46-year administrative career with Maryland began.

My first office space was in the switchboard in Zengerstrasse. As well as serving as a secretary to the director's secretary, I served as backup for the switchboard operator during registration periods, the weeks immediately preceding the start of each eight-week term. The switchboard was also the keeper of faculty mailboxes and all the "full-timers" in the Heidelberg area came in to collect their mail from our office. Once the term was underway, we forwarded the mail to the faculty at their new location. That part was interesting because we got to know some of the faculty very well.

The switchboard was central to the functioning of the European Division because all communication between the administrators and the field sites was conducted by telephone or by mail. The staff gave us their list of calls for the day and it was our responsibility to connect them as soon as possible. The physical switchboard itself was quite a challenge in those days. We had to key in a four-digit prefix to the base we were trying to access, upon which we'd hear a busy signal, or, if we were lucky, a recording saying something along the lines of "Vilseck, dial your number". Sometimes we had to dial non-stop for half an hour just to get through to the base, only to find the education center line was busy.... back to square one. To reach further afield centers, for example, those in Turkey, we had to access a communications hub, which in Turkey's case was Brindisi, Italy. The operators in Brindisi were Italian and barely spoke English, which presented quite a challenge when trying to communicate that you would like to be connected with Çigli or Diyarbakir in Turkey. And then for some remote sites, we needed to connect to military communication points and remember to say things like "over" and "out" which I thought was very cool at the time. Another challenge was sending the

equivalent of a telegram, known as a Telex. For this we needed to be competent with the military phonetic alphabet...alfa, bravo, charlie, delta, echo, foxtrot, etc. as we dictated the text through. The following year, the military introduced a new phone system in Europe: Autovon – Automatic Voice Network. This allowed us to dial right through to the end user but there were quite a few frustrating teething problems at the time.

You may think I am dwelling too much on the technological features of how we got things done “in the old days,” but the more I think back to the changes that took place over the years I was with the European Division, the more impressed I am by the competence and creativity of our “then” selves. When I joined the European Division there were 56 staff members in house and, I believe, three field staff, known at the time as field representatives. There were three Area Directors, two in the Heidelberg offices, and one in the UK. They managed nearly 300 education centers spread widely across an area which included quite a few sites outside of Europe, e.g. Peshawar, Pakistan Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Kenitra, Morocco.

My secretarial duties were not very taxing. The Director (at the time a retired Air Force Colonel named Henry Walker) never dictated but always hand wrote his correspondence and all I had to do was type what he wrote. Luckily, he had very neat handwriting so this was not a challenge. I didn't mention that when I took the typing test on the day of my interview, I was given a manual typewriter to use, so I was quite relieved to find I had the use of an electric typewriter for my work. Electric typewriters of the day had some interesting traits. If one typed too enthusiastically, the keys tangled into a woven mess that could take five minutes or more to remedy. Also, the practice at the time was to make two copies of all correspondence, using carbon paper, and a special flimsy paper that was color-coded according to the senior staff member. If I made a typing error on the main copy, I could use a product called Tippex, a white-coated sheet that worked like carbon paper, on the top sheet to eradicate the error. However, carbon copies were trickier. They exposed the true skill of the typist! Occasionally we needed to distribute many copies of a document, for example, an information sheet for the education centers. We did not have photocopy machines back then and had to use a spirit duplicator machine, that required us to type on a special kind of stencil that produced a mirror image on the reverse side of the typed stencil. Here again, typos caused quite a challenge as the error had to be painstakingly scraped off the back of the stencil with a razor blade, then the paper reinserted into the typewriter in exactly the same place to correct the error. Also, the spirit used in these machines smelt abominable. Fortunately, they were housed in the printshop and not in the offices.

In early 1969, the secretary to the area director whose area included every center that wasn't in Germany or the United Kingdom (the title was Area Director, Mediterranean and Middle East), announced that she was leaving Germany to open a translation agency in Tokyo. This was an opportunity I was very keen to apply for, not only because the work seemed more challenging and interesting, but also

because I would have my very own IBM ball typewriter! I had lusted after one of these machines for quite a while, having had my fill of disentangling recalcitrant keys on my old model. Jim Raciti, hired me, so that became a new beginning for me, where I learned about the intricacies of scheduling and staffing courses (face-to-face, of course).

Two years later, I moved on again, to the position of personnel and faculty logistics coordinator. This was quite a difficult job, the core responsibility was to assist staff and full-time faculty to obtain the necessary papers to do their jobs in the military environment: id cards, ration cards, car registration, military flight orders, security clearances, military housing and so on. We also sold car insurance for AIU (at the time the only automobile insurance company approved to ensure USAREUR drivers). We managed to develop an amicable working relationship with our military partners, so that part usually went quite well. What didn't always work so well was the communication from the area director offices, who often forgot to inform us when assignments were changed at the last minute. There were always crises to be solved: last minute changes, faculty arriving and no BOQs available, and so on. I loved it! Every year in August, the new group of full-time faculty arrived in Heidelberg. They and their partners had to be provided with all their credentials, including passing the USAEUR driver's test within three or four days. There were always a few who did not study for, and consequently failed, their driver's test. After the first year, I decided to add a driver's test workshop to the events during the faculty orientation week. That way, we managed to get everyone through the test in the allotted time. In the most difficult orientation week, I believe it was 1974, we had 77 people (new faculty and their wives and husbands) going through the orientation. It was wild.

At the time, Vida Bandis (my boss) managed the business office and the publications department as well as logistics and often in the evenings we used to sit together and proofread flyers. On one such occasion, I remember discussing the decision to purchase a new mainframe computer for the Heidelberg offices to streamline the maintenance of student records. Until then, a card (PRC - Permanent Record Card) was kept in large filing cabinets in the registrar's office. These were updated by typewriter by the student records staff with the enrollments at the beginning of term and the grades at the end of the term. Vida and I were thrilled about how much more efficient we would be with the new computer and the savings we would make in paper and personnel. How innocent we were, for it didn't happen that way. Within a year, we had added a third more staff and costs had skyrocketed.

I had my first child in June 1975 and decided I couldn't keep up the stressful twelve-hour a day job and be a good mother at the same time. As luck would have it, the academic advisor for degree candidates was also pregnant and looking to reduce her hours. Luckily Vida Bandis (my boss) and John Brazda (admissions director) agreed to let that happen. I was amazed at how complex evaluation (as it was then known) of prior academic experience was. There were thousands of rules than needed to be learned, understood, and applied to a never-ending intake of student records. Our

job was to screen the degree applicants and ensure they had met all degree requirements. It entailed a lot of complex problems to solve. Sometimes a student had not received good advice from one or our evaluators and we had to find solutions without the student becoming aware they might need additional coursework to complete the degree. We enjoyed the challenge and I found it very rewarding to solve a problem. The academic advisors were a fun group, given to practical jokes and other disruptive behaviours, which was understandable, given the nature of the work, which required intense concentration during a large part of the day.

For the next thirteen years, I continued as degree candidate advisor, working a three- or four-day week. I was lucky that Maryland was flexible and allowed me to work this schedule during the time I was bringing up four small children.

Not central to my position as advisor, was a role I played in a committee that was working with a consultant to design a suitable database for the next mainframe, an HP3000 minicomputer. It was at this time I became very interested in database design and learned a lot about the different departments and how they interact. Sometimes the meetings were interminable but the resulting database served its purpose for over 25 years. In fact, during 1999, we spent a great deal of programming time, updating various tables to handle four-digit dates to get ready for the year 2000. At the time of original design, the consultant told us saving space was more important than planning for the year 2000 because by then we would have another system!