

Karamürsel – An Assignment “with Benefits”

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I started the 1971-72 academic year, my first in the European Division after one year in the FED, with back-to-back assignments at Bitburg AFB in Germany. With money I had saved in Asia I invested in a 1972 VW Kombi camper with pop-up roof, since I planned to do as much traveling as time allowed. Thus when for Term III Joe Arden sent me to the sun and warmth of Athens I drove there, spent weekends seeing and experiencing everything Greek, and drove back to Heidelberg via Yugoslavia despite a warning from the US Embassy that my green license plates would cause me problems in the then communist country [they didn't].

When told by Joe that for Term IV I would be teaching in Turkey I was delighted by the prospect of another trip to the Med with much to see and learn. I don't recall who advised me that taking my car to Turkey was not a good idea. Problems crossing the Greek-Turkish border, customs official who expected bribes.... As my assignment would be the small Air Force security base, Karamürsel, rather than the much larger Incirlik air base, they told me a car wasn't a necessity. I listened and left the car behind.

Maryland arranged my travel; a “Nightingale” flight from Wiesbaden with stops in Italy and Greece before circling the air strip twice [to scare away the sheep] and land at Yalovah. If I remember correctly I was the only one deplaning. There was a rolling stairs and a car waiting for me, and not much else. The ride to the base was perhaps 20 minutes.

After being deposited at Marmara Hall and leaving my luggage in my BOQ room I went to meet the base Education Services Officer, Bill Berlin. Bill had a reputation for liking Maryland instructors and filling classes. He wasted no time explaining his methods. All incoming personnel were subject to his mandatory briefing on the values of a college education. Bill used charts and numbers to extoll promotion rates, post-military employment and the like. Without being explicit he also made clear to me that he expected all of “his” students to get at least passing grades.

When I met the first of my three Psychology classes a day later to go over the syllabus, course requirements, etc. I encountered an unexpected problem. With the military working in the base's “elephant cage” assigned to duty “flights,” they would miss significant class time when their work shift overlapped my teaching hours. My solution was to require that those affected would take the course as a “learning pair.” An Able flight student could pair with either a Baker or Charlie so that one of the two was always in attendance. They were expected to work out how to divide readings, share notes and complete assignments. They would take the open-book mid-term and final exam together, within the same time frame as the rest of the class, and with only one answer permitted from the two of them. One or two non-flight students told me it would be an unfair advantage to allow a pair to work together on an exam. To preclude a complaint to the ESO I briefed Bill on my unorthodox solution, explaining that as a Psychologist I knew what I was doing [not really]. He had no objection especially after I told him this would be the best way to ensure that all students could complete my classes.

With the attendance issue taken care of I was able to focus time and attention on finishing my doctoral dissertation on Pop music and youth culture. The subject matter gave me an entrée to the on-base radio station, KCFR. After being a guest on several programs, answering listeners' question about

alleged links between music and anti-social [read "drug usage"] or anti-war behaviors, I was asked if I wanted my own radio show. That was a no-brainer, "Yes." So on Saturdays from noon to 1:00 o'clock I became HK the DJ with an oldies program I called "Rock Recollections" "...coming to you from Karamürsel Common Defense Installation." With the program came a key to the studio and its very extensive record collection, turntables, tape recorders with editing and splicing equipment and permission to spend as much time "preparing my programs" as I wanted. It was not at all unusual for me to come to "work" at 10 PM when the station went to an external feed and the evening DJ went home and stay until 3 or 4 AM.

The Saturday program also raised my profile in the base community so when there was a special event at the Oak Club that needed a judge for an award, I was invited as an impartial outsider to be that person. Whatever it was, the ceremony followed a dinner at which I was seated to the right of the base commander's wife. Of the wine served with dinner she consumed a considerable quantity during both the meal and the award ceremony for which I had designated the winner. The evening then continued with dance music. At this point the Colonel's wife asked me to dance. I had seen "The Graduate" and had no interest in meeting "Mrs. Robinson" so I declined. A number or two later she asked me again, and unable to think of a good excuse to say "No," I told her that unfortunately dancing was against my religion. When put on the spot to explain I told her I was a non-practicing Druid. With a look that told me she was having difficulty believing me I added, "You see, I was born in the Netherlands." That must have been consistent with her image of windmills, wooden shoes and tulip bulbs because she didn't ask me again.

Term IV went smoothly. After the mid-term students quickly concluded that two heads were not necessarily better than one. Agreeing on a single answer to a question involved trust, compromise, communication skills and other traits required in small group work. In some ways this "fix" to a scheduling problem presaged a learning environment that would become commonplace thirty years later. This hoped for [for me] but unexpected [for them] outcome of the Psych courses was possibly the most important learning students took away.

The Term ended with no student incompletes or drops. I think everyone passed and student feedback was good. Bill Berlin was happy and asked to have me back Term IV, 1972-73. Therefore it was a pleasure to return to my favorite installation a year later.