

Vignettes of Teaching in Europe and Asia

Julian Jones
October 2020

1. *Learning to Handle my First Three-Hour Evening Class, Bitburg, Germany*

Leaving the Army with a European discharge in late 1968, I was delighted to pick up an adjunct teaching job with University of Maryland's European Division. I aimed to spend a year gaining teaching experience and seeing the rest of Europe. As it turned out, I remained 30 years with Maryland.

Much of my teaching was shaped by my first assignment at Bitburg. Arriving there five days early, I remember spending day after day in the base library writing lectures for those daunting three-hour evening sessions. I had never taught anything but standard 50-minute classes before and felt a bit panicky.

A couple of days before the start of classes an older faculty member whom I had met the day before walked up to me in the library and asked if I was preparing an article. When I told him I was writing out lectures, he smiled and gave me some excellent advice: relax, develop fifteen-minute lecturettes and engage the class with questions that will lead discussion after each. He reminded me the students were coming off full days of work. Three hours of lecture would lose them to sleep or even encourage withdrawal from the course.

His was probably the best teaching advice I ever received, and I followed it throughout my Maryland teaching career. As I got to know the students that term, I realized how different they were from the 18-21- year- olds I taught as a graduate student. Not only were they working all day before class, but many were first generation college students, often from the rural South or urban areas in the North. They were older than my previous students, probably averaging 25-30. A major advantage of military service to these students was the opportunity to pursue higher education and land a better job when they left the military.

2. *Good Advice from Two Students at Kagnew Station, Asmara, Ethiopia*

By the time I got to Asmara in 1970, I was confident enough in my teaching to enjoy the exotic East African location during down time. The small city of Asmara that hosted the base was an odd mixture of Italy and Ethiopia, located high enough above sea level to be comfortable and close to many of the country's premier cultural sites. The students were excellent, as good as those I had anywhere, probably because Kagnew Station was a typical Cold War listening post with many intelligence staff and linguists.

Toward the end of the first semester, I told my students I was planning an overland trip to Cairo during the term break, using shared taxis, local buses and a Nile steamer. I had the vague idea of following in the tracks of 19th century travelers and explorers. After class, two students approached me and suggested my trip might not be safe. They could not be more specific than noting unspecified dangers of overland travel in Sudan. Both were top students and served in my former branch of service, Military Intelligence. I gradually understood why they couldn't provide (classified) details, and when they said,

“We’d like you to be here to teach your follow-on course next term....” I finally realized how serious they were and decided on safer travel during the term break. Fortunate that I did, when later I read about rampant kidnapping in Sudan.

3. *Maryland Career in Jeopardy, Karamursel, Turkey*

During the 1970 summer break, I decided to improve my halting French by taking a six-week immersion course at the *Institut de Francais, Villefranche sur Mer*. As it turned out, I was distracted by a Finnish woman there for the same reason. Neither of us learned much French. Soon we became friends and by the end of the summer were inseparable. I was assigned to Karamursel, Turkey, and asked if she’d consider joining me. She would, and we travelled across Europe to Turkey in my Volkswagen Beetle.

As we approached the base, I noticed the high fences and the radio towers that I had seen at Kagnew Station, Ethiopia. This was a security base, a listening post. Yes, that meant excellent students but also limited access, or no access, for a travel companion without ID card and military orders. Being a Finn would likely make it even more difficult. What do you do in this circumstance when you are young, impulsive and in love?

We decided to hide Taru to get through the security checkpoint at the entrance gate. That is not an easy task in a VW Beetle, but we managed with bags and clothing, and I drove up to the gate. The security guard stopped me, checked my ID card and orders and looked over the car. He then said, “Please pull over, Sir.” In those seconds while I parked and waited for him, I imagined an ignominious end to my Maryland career and no reference letters for the next position. How could I have been so stupid?

The guard approached, I rolled down the window, and he asked: “What will you be teaching, Sir?” I can still feel the sense of relief when I discussed my courses, and he said he’d see me in American Government.

After a day or two, I went to the base education officer, Bill Berlin, and laid out my situation. One of the best ESOs I ever met, Bill used his excellent contacts on base to work out a temporary ID for Taru. Enjoying great students on a base close to Istanbul made this a memorable semester.

4. *Missing Roommate, Utapao, Thailand*

An assignment to Utapao Air Base in Thailand brought me close to the war in Vietnam. The base housed B-52 bombers supporting U.S. and South Vietnamese forces. I taught there Terms 1 and 2, fall 1972. Arriving by bus from Bangkok, I learned I’d share my BOQ room with a B-52 crewmember named Justin. He was an electronics warfare officer on one of the big planes. We talked a lot as the term progressed. He was interested in part of my course that dealt with human aggression and war, and I was intrigued by his flying experience. (I earned a pilot’s license at 17). Although not a student, he came to a few of my class sessions.

He described the bombing runs over South Vietnam as boring. All of that changed on December 18 when the B-52s at Utapao and Anderson Base on Guam were ordered to attack Hanoi and Haiphong.

They suffered significant losses, and I watched the big planes return, some trailing smoke. Ambulances met a couple of the bombers. It reminded me of documentaries showing WW II B-17s returning to bases in Britain's East Anglia after raids on Germany in 1944.

All this became more poignant when my roommate did not return. His B-52 was lost over Hanoi. That was all I could learn. The theories discussed in my course met the realities of war.

Decades later, I visited Hanoi as part of a Johns Hopkins University group building education ties. Our trip grew from a general warming of U.S.-Vietnamese relations in response to an aggressive China. One of the sights on a city tour was a monument to Vietnamese missile crews who had brought down so many B-52s. It stood on the side of a shallow lake from which protruded the wreckage of a B-52. Could this have been my long-ago roommate's plane, I wondered. It was a poignant Maryland moment.