

## A Global Nomad with a Mission – European Division

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It was with great satisfaction that I returned to Germany in 1991, the country of my birth, to teach business and management on over 20 military sites for UMUC. I had left that country as a war orphan while Frankfurt was in rubble during the first years of the American Occupation.

It was a sweet homecoming to a modern country – recently reunified, East and West Germany were one nation once again - Germany. Change was everywhere and most visibly in the roads being repaired in the east as Germans were streaming in from the “*Ostzone*” for better jobs. Many were reuniting with relatives in the west while others went east to reclaim properties confiscated during the Soviet occupation. The Soviet Union collapsed later that year signaling the end of the Cold War

It was an exciting yet uncertain time. The U.S. military in Europe would be downsizing with military sites closing. Often, I was one of the last instructors to teach there including, Wiesbaden, Mainz, Munich, parts of Augsburg and Stuttgart, Aschaffenburg, Bitburg, etc. My one -year contracts gave me little certainty, but it worked out for me to stay and work in the European Division for the next six years

The first days of orientation at the UMUC Heidelberg headquarters were typical social welcoming events. The European Division included teaching sites well beyond Germany—happily my assignments included Italy and Bahrain during my time there. Joe Arden, our director, and his team of area directors and staff let us newbies know they were there to support our mission so that our students had a productive learning experience. A good sign that my positive experience in the Asia Division was to continue and be global.

After the usual business of getting our military ID cards, we had to get a military driver’s license to drive on the German Autobahn. It was panic time amid jet lag for all of us. A few failed the test. Woe! The questions were complicated with lots of road signs to identify and to know. The strict guidelines for the German – Good Samaritan Law was new to most of us. This law required us to keep a full first aid kit in our cars and stop for accidents and offer first aid if no one else was around to help. In the end, all made it through the tests to be legitimized with military driver’s licenses to meet the challenges of the roads.

We were kept busy with course distributions that included our designated teaching sites – I got three different military sites for my first eight- week session. Loading up on text books and reams of general information about the area and military protocol we managed to also drink great beer and eat bratwurst while sitting in the town square with a stunning view of the famous Heidelberg castle.



New faculty in Heidelberg, 1991

In memory of my graduate studies on Max Weber, I took the grand hike along the winding *Philosophen Weg* – across the river Neckar with intermittent views of the town and castle.



A view from the Philosopher's Walk across the river

Good feelings of camaraderie with my new colleagues were infused with the happy discovery of the Italian ice cream shops selling deliciously addictive gelato.

The day of reckoning came with the mandate that we all needed to get our own transportation. Cars were bought mainly from the self-serve used car lot at the U.S. military housing and shopping center in Heidelberg called Patrick Henry Village. These used “car lots” were typical in the military overseas as military personnel sold their “junkers” when leaving to incoming personnel who bought them for their temporary transportation needs while stationed there. We had little time to make decisions. I chose a 1980 four door Mercedes with a manual transmission and a diesel engine. I failed to ask how fast it could go on the Autobahn. A big mistake. I learned later that it could go only 115K (about 71 mph) at top speed. I had to quickly compensate for that on the road!

I now owned a Mercedes! Most importantly, the tires were in good condition for the winter driving ahead. The manual choke was fiddly and troublesome until I had it repaired. I called it my Panzer. It was a “tank”. Sadly, the hood ornament was missing. One essential addition was to buy a new star hood ornament at the local Mercedes dealer. It made all the difference to my driving to see that hood ornament. I had arrived.

We disbanded from the UMUC headquarters by packing our cars with our two suitcases, new text books for our courses and maps that showed us our destination. Most of us learned to keep a box in our trunk that we called our office. The box contained our teaching materials and was refreshed with new materials as needed each term. Some of us formed a small convoy as we headed in similar directions. The world expanded rapidly once I entered the Autobahn – without a GPS - only with a memorized set of off-ramps called Ausfahrts.

My first eight-week lodging was a rented room with one of the field reps in Grosauheim. Her husband was on Temporary Duty (TDY) in Turkey. The room came with kitchen privileges and unlimited red current snacks from the abundant bushes in the garden. My hostess had an excitable Doberman Pincher who gave the occasional growl outside my door at night. I got used to it. It worked.

Two of my classes were nearby. It was an easy commute to these infantry army posts. Students arrived in uniform and seemed tired and weary from work and stress. It was a no frills environment. The building was surrounded by huge trucks and other equipment.



My students near Hanau Germany 1991

One of my teaching sites along the Main River bordered on an ominous steaming nuclear power plant – a shock to my eyes from a distance. But as I approached it revealed a pastoral setting of a shepherd with hundreds of sheep grazing around the nuclear plant. A marvelous dichotomy between old and new.

My teaching routine was to complete the morning class and prepare for the next session. Then, eat and prepare for evening classes. Lunch beckoned. But, oddly, German eating places closed for lunch. It was their “Mittagspause”. As an entrepreneur, it made no sense to me. Adjusting to the culture included bringing prepared food. It was one of many flexible changes needed in my time in other countries.

Twice a week I drove to an evening class in Wurzburg about 100 K or 60 miles away. I would drive on the # 3 Autobahn, a main arterial going east and west. It was a visible supply chain of trucks full of merchandise coming and going to Western and Eastern Europe. During the daylight hours I delighted in seeing license plates from Poland, Hungary, Rumania as well as Germany, Belgium, France etc. I also saw long convoys of large U.S. military trucks a very visible sign of their large presence in Germany.

The divided two-lane highway meandered through a mountain range. Long lines of trucks heaved over hills. It was hard to pass them. A problem. With dismay I discovered that my car maxed out at 115K - 71mph. This meant I could not drive in the fast lane where passenger cars were going 140 – 160 K or 80 to 90 mph. With great care I timed my driving to get out behind the trucks and pass three to four trucks at a time. My car and adrenalin were in high gear each time. Little did I anticipate being saved by a truck driver – who I would never know - one dark night when driving back from my class in Wurzburg.

One evening in Wurzburg, after a full day of teaching, after my students left and the lights were out, I dutifully returned the classroom keys to the MP station on post. It was almost 10 p.m. and the drive back to my rented room would take over an hour. Long lines of red lights greeted me as I entered the Autobahn going west. I settled into the convoy of trucks in the slow lane as usual ready to pass when possible. Cautiously I looked into the rear-view mirror and also over my left shoulder and mirror. It was dark – no lights along the road. If the right lane was free of oncoming car headlights I would drive as fast as my car would allow to get out and pass as many trucks as possible. Then, I got back into the convoy.

It worked many times until that almost fateful time when I pulled into the fast lane and the truck behind me blinked his lights very fast. What? That was odd! Then, the truck behind me followed me into the fast line - very closely - still blinking his lights... Danger! Now partially in the fast lane I glanced to my left again. A scary sight approached like a speeding bullet (it must have been a Porsche they are noted for their speed) - came barreling down the fast lane toward me. In an instant I knew the truck behind me was saving me and would have taken the hit. Immediately I pulled back into the slow lane and the car on my right sped past!

My life had been saved by a stranger driving a truck. He had alerted me and followed me to be a buffer for the speeding car in the fast lane. That truck would have taken the brutal hit to save me.

Suddenly I felt immensely grateful for the good people – even strangers I would never know- in this world who care to protect and shelter others. It was a miracle to me, and it is a lasting thankful memory.

My next assignment was in the greater Frankfurt area- to include Bonn which was then still the capital city of Germany even when reunified. The capital would be moved back to Germany’s former capital city - Berlin a short time later once reunification was stabilized. My assignments for the next three terms

required much daily travel ranging from Frankfurt to Mainz, Aschaffenburg, Giessen and Bonn. But I was at home in a comfort zone living and socializing with cousins in the village of my childhood 8 kilometers from Frankfurt. It was a sweet time of acceptance to walk the village streets and surrounding fields. It provided a sense of closure to childhood memories by visiting the graves of my father – killed during the war, uncles who met the same fate, loving grandparents who had cared for me, cousins and childhood friends who perished in automobile accidents.

Rhein/Main Airbase where I taught many classes in the years to come had a special place in my heart. It was here where my older brother at 17 had been employed to help build the airstrip that would facilitate the airlift “*Luftbruecke*” in 1949 and on, to carry supplies to Berlin that had the odd distinction of being a free city in communist East Germany once it had fallen to communism. My 17 year old brother worked as a day laborer there. He earned real money to share with our family. It was a fortune in hard currency to us. The Rhein/Main money was celebrated by me as a six year old when my brother used part of his paycheck to purchase a dress for me for my initiation to the first grade. It was new and not made from left over scraps. It was a wonderful gift. A memory I cherish to this day. I wore it proudly on my first day to school. In honor of his generosity, I would often sit at the runway at Rhein/Main Airbase and celebrate the past. The runway eventually become part of the Frankfurt airport when the Airbase was closed years later.



*My first day of school wearing my first new dress purchased with money my brother earned while helping to build the runway at Rhein/Main Airbase.*

My “homecoming to my native land” was of mixed emotions with reunions of landmarks and childhood memories. Most importantly for me was to solve war mysteries associated with the area surrounding my village and Germany as a whole. It was a lifelong mission and continued to be my “hidden agenda” while working for UMUC in Germany. I found many answers while there.

My explorations included student field trips – one was most significant when we toured Hoechst AG the former IG Farben plant that escaped all Allied bombings. The company tour guide – a Quacker quietly revealed to me – in German - a part of the mystery why this war plant escaped bombings. The answer is subtly couched in Eisenhowers message to the U.S. Congress.

In time I would spend endless hours on secondary research in addition to exploring historic sites to learn the mysteries of Germany’s history. My research included tangible places where I would teach such as in the building in Frankfurt where Eisenhower had been stationed. I would connect with Patton when driving through the narrow city gate in Dudeldorf where Patton got his tank stuck, learn about political dichotomies while visiting Karl Marx’s house that had been taken over by Hitler to house his Nazi headquarters in Trier. For a while I lived in the former Bismark Kaserne where Rommel had his headquarters and would meet his son Manfred Rommel who was then the mayor of Stuttgart.

Most importantly, while based in Munich I visited Dachau, and learned that this was the initial political prisoner camp of Hitler where he broke the German resistance. It was a shocking but healing process to know that there had indeed been a strong resistance to Hitler by good Germans. I walked along miles of the former Roman Wall (Limes) that had tried to keep out German tribes out of what was now Germany. It was a time of discoveries that are now recorded in my personal memoir.

My teaching at the U.S. embassy in Bonn was always a happy occasion. It gave me access to many international students connected to the foreign embassies there. Many were the dependents of diplomats and some were foreign nationals working for their home country embassies.

The classes were held in the American High School connected to the embassy, and many of my students would arrive in chauffeured diplomat vehicles. They all spoke English but mostly with British accents. A telling sign who their tutors had been. They were gregarious, confident and mixed well with my U.S. students who were based at the U.S. embassy. The SOFA agreement (Status of Forces Agreement) only allowed us to teach foreign nationals within the embassies’ umbrella. But, I would later also teach at our newly created Schwaebisch Gmuend Campus which was UMUC’s international campus outside of the military contractual agreement.

From time to time I would be invited to events at various embassies and learned much about culture and exotic foods. Drinks tended to be exotic fruit juices in fancy wine glasses if the host was from a Moslem country.

Fun things to do in Bonn included a side trip to the former Adenauer residence now a museum. It overlooked the Rhine and had a lovely garden office surrounded by the roses Adenauer loved when he lived there. The Beethoven residence was also near Bonn and surrounded by a beautiful garden. Lunch at the embassy club was always a special treat. It overlooked the Rhine and had a large outdoor chess set that was enjoyable to mentally play along as I watched the game proceed while eating lunch.

The best part of my assignment in Bonn was the nearby cathedral in Cologne. It drew me like a magnet each time to sit deep inside surrounded by stained glass, candles, and hushed whispers. Although raised

a Lutheran, I was then in my defiant agnostic stage. But cathedrals in Europe always had a calming effect on me and I would seek them out to sit in silence and absorb the beauty of these sanctuaries of the world outside. They were resting places and healing retreats. Cologne and the Theatinerkirche in Munich were to become favorites to visits to rejuvenate my soul.



*Some of my international students in Bonn. Many are dependents of foreign diplomats in embassies in Bonn, Germany 1992*

*Field trips with my students included the Deutsche Bank, a major car show at the Frankfurt Messe, the Opel factory, BMW, HP, and Hoechst AG. BMW was the most popular. Students were astonished to learn that employees were allowed a pint of beer – on tap in their employee cafeteria – during their lunch break. It was Bavarian law to allow the consumption of a pint of beer during work hours. Each field trip was educational by revealing new concepts to my business students. HP outside of Stuttgart had a mixed German/American culture. The formal Sie was replaced by the informal Du. Employees were incorporated into an American open- door policy. We met their U.S. CEO who literally had an open door to his office and who also mixed freely with employees by eating in their lunchroom. Many of their breakout places were designed to have rounded benches so that employees tended to be facing each other rather than look at each other's back.*

*Our day at Hoechst AG two kilometers from my childhood village was most interesting to me. Hoechst AG – the former IG Farben was never bombed – a rare thing because it also was important to Hitler’s effort. Hence my village in close proximity was saved because IG Farben was not a bombing target by the Allies while the ravages of bombings in nearby Frankfurt turned that city to rubble. But, we learned that the factory’s longevity also made it old and derelict. There were constant accidents as the factory infrastructure crumbled. I learned much that day from the retired executive - a peace loving Quaker who confided information to me that gave me significant insight into my German history puzzle.*



Field trip with students to Hoechst AG near Frankfurt



SG students at Frankfurt Messe car show

Other series of assignments were in Bitburg and Spangdahlem Airbases near the old Roman distribution hub of Trier and the Luxemburg border. My Air Force students were techy and savvy in supporting the F-15 fighter plane mission at both bases. Some of them took an optional MWR tour with me to Verdun on the day of the 75<sup>th</sup> armistice of WWI.

In Verdun, we learned about logistics to the war effort there. It was a teaching moment of management issues never to be forgotten as we toured underground bunkers and cemeteries. Shockingly, we saw films at Verdun that showed many of the British and French fighters in WWI. Never before had we known that many of the British and French soldiers were in fact non-British and non-French but natives from their colonies and protectorates that included Burma, India, and North Africa.

It was a lesson in manpower. War was also visible in the cemeteries that had non-Christian symbols – reflecting the Moslem faith on their headstones.

While living in Dudeldorf it was an easy trip for lunch in Trier at the French Officers Club. This was a wonderful find but also very curious. The French were still officially based (occupied?) in Trier. There was a full accompanied-tour housing development for French military family, a commissary and an Officer's Club that offered the most delicious lunches complete with a carafe of wine and a desert cart of – always French - cheeses and fruit. My U.S. military card had value and gave me full access.

At their commissary, I heard the manager speak German with a bread delivery person. So, I went to him and asked in German where I could find their cheeses. I got a very hostile look from the manager who asked me to leave immediately – “Deutsche sind nicht erlaubt - Germans are not allowed”. It was funny to me, but I understood immediately from his tone. The old conflict still there perhaps? I pulled out my U.S. military ID and spoke in English telling him I was American. So, that was fine with him. I was directed to the French cheeses. A great find!

My visit to Luxembourg American Cemetery was overwhelmingly filled with many rows of white crosses. A reminder of the sacrifices that were made during WWII. I paid my respects to Patton at his grave. He had liberated Frankfurt in the spring of 1945 - a blessing for my family when the bombing stopped. Walking the fields of Belgium near Malmedy I retraced the route of the tanks made famous in the movie Battle of the Bulge. Landmines are still buried in unknown places there. From time to time one explodes.

My assignment to Munich was a wanderer's paradise. I maxed it out. I was among the last faculty to teach at McGraw Kaserne and had the great fortune to live in a military subsidized and affordable - furnished balconied two- bedroom apartment nearby while there. I went into action and bought a bike, signed up for multiple MWR events to include: a two- day guided hiking tour up the Zugspitze, paragliding and hang-gliding lessons, and a visit to the salt mines in nearby Salzburg. Being single and unattached I managed to effectively teach my three classes – one in Munich and two in Augsburg. The students were mainly army and as always I loved teaching them.



Biking in the Bavarian countryside



Hang-gliding in Bavaria

One of the best jobs I ever had, thanks to Joe Arden's confidence in me, was as the director of corporate relations at UMUC's new international campus in the city of Schwaebisch Gmuend (SG). It was located about 50 kilometers from Stuttgart. It was a challenge. I loved helping to try making it a success.

My life at SG campus included many roles. Teaching business and management part-time I also initiated the International Career Center by introducing the campus to companies around Germany by attending American Chamber of Commerce meetings around Germany and working with the press to promote the campus and our students.

The campus was based in the Bismarck Kaserne which had been the headquarters for Erwin Rommel and later the headquarters for the U.S. Pershing Missile site which had been located 10 kilometers away.

When I arrived in 1994 I was responsible to help with marketing a graduate program and then as the liaison to our advisory board that included city officials and prominent business leaders. It was a beautiful campus with residence buildings to house our students who came from any parts of the world. Our curriculum was American and taught in English.

I soon learned from my many meetings with the business community that we had a prized commodity in our students. The students were fluent in English and also very capable in German. The American degree in business was also a value to companies because it focused on innovation and adapting to changing circumstances.

When scheduling field trips with companies I asked students to dress in business casual and would introduce them at the companies by stating their home countries and language skills. The students were a big hit. I soon received calls from the HR departments of these companies offering internship and requesting on campus visits to recruit our students. Hewlett Packard, Siemens, Weleda. Deutsche Bank and Bosch were some of the companies to seek and hire interns. Some companies donated funds to bring new students from the collapsed Soviet Union to study in at SG.



Ernie Hankammer, Bob Jerome with me in the middle

It was a win-win while I was there. The only drawback was that I could no longer have a military ID so I lost my driving privileges and access to my much beloved salsa sauce at the commissary. My time at SG lasted for 3 years but family responsibilities required that I return home to take care of a mother who had a series of strokes. I had anticipated this and took training to teach online in the last year I was there. I was to become one of UMUC's pioneers in online teaching.

Dan Bennet at the UMUC Heidelberg headquarters had asked for volunteers to take the online training in 1995-96. A small group of early-adapters – myself included took him up on it. It was a primitive online course by today's standards. It operated as an email course with computers that still had Ram space issues and the world-wide-web concept was a small reality but still science fiction in most minds. My computer skills were self-taught and limited. Computers still crashed regularly and problem solving with the help desk was cumbersome because I did not have the vocabulary to know the difference between an icon, task bar or Ram. EEEK!

But I managed to struggle through to learn and when I left SG in late 1996 I had done my first email online course with our overseas program in Russia. Before I left the European Division and SG, I took my last overseas assignment to teach in Sicily before going back to take care of my mother who was now in a rest home in Victoria B.C. Canada. She was desperately waiting from me to take care of her in her last year.

I would continue to teach for UMUC online from a log cabin on Vancouver Island in Canada. Times were changing and so was online teaching. We evolved rapidly quickly to a web-based delivery system primitive by today's standards, but it improved each year to become the leader in the education industry. That is another story to tell.



Graduation at SG. Vida Bandis, Ernie Hankammer and members of the advisory board