

## A Global Nomad with a Mission – Asia part 1.

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Teaching by candle light to students wearing full battle gear including gas masks during the First Gulf War blackouts on Osan Airbase set the stage for my UMUC overseas career. Screaming fighter jet engines on their daily practice flights invigorated me on afternoon runs. MWR recreational outings included challenges such as grasping bamboo branches while struggling to the top of Mt Songri. These were the beginnings of my rich kaleidoscope of memories as a professor for UMUC. In time I would teach on over 25 U.S. military bases while moving from place to place around the world.

Free to be me: The time was right for me to become a traveling professor with the University of Maryland University College in 1990. My daughters were grown and independent. I was single again, healthy, and ready to indulge my curiosity for places yet unknown.

A year after my first application to UMUC I was invited to interview at their Maryland headquarters in the Adelphi - Marriot compound in April, 1990. Grits for breakfast and fresh biscuits for lunch set the stage for a new cultural experience that would expand over many years. After a day of interviews with many kind people I got the offer to teach in their Asian division. It was a great fit. My adventure was to start in the fall.

By August my U.S. life and obligations were put on hold. I left with two suitcases. A small 40 pound crate of books was shipped to Asia courtesy of the U.S. military. My mission to expand knowledge and disseminate it began. Our newbie faculty group's first orientation gathered in Oakland, California. Faculty came from many places around the U.S. to start our trip to Asia.

UMUC administrators and staff knew how to organize efficiently and with pizzas. They welcomed us warmly setting the stage for humanely integrating the new – a wonderful, much appreciated trait of the global culture of UMUC at the time. My colleagues varied in age, background and discipline. We had some Fulbright scholars, a married couple, a few adventure seekers on sabbatical, and people like me looking for meaningful teaching experiences in new places. Camaraderie expanded fast and easy with good food, reams of sheets of information and our shared excitement for what lay ahead. It was a comfort zone that stayed with me for many years while at UMUC.

Leaving our home country, we landed briefly in Alaska which was in the midnight sun. After a sleepy Trans-Pacific flight we emerged in Tokyo to be greeted by humidity and incremental rains. I soon learned that the little umbrella in my room was practical and necessary. It became part of my outside wardrobe to keep dry from the unpredictable daily rain. The camera that I wore as an attachment around my neck now fogged up as soon as I stepped outside. It was my introduction to steamy weather and sticky clothes that became the norm all summer long.

Our orientation at Yokota Airbase in Tokyo introduced us to the military side of our teaching roles, the university culture, the academic responsibilities and how to enjoy and adjust to our multi-cultural environment. Staff and administrators understood about adaptation and flexibility

and how to minimize stressful transitions. They explained with bits of good humor options about – housing, transportation, supplies, etc. The agenda was exhaustingly full. A great buffer to fatigue was the fun stuff tucked into each day made pleasant with the upbeat attitudes of all who attended.



New faculty and administrators 1990

The First Gulf War started during our orientation in Japan. Some faculty old timers had somber looks – they heard it in the engines of planes leaving. Soon there would be no C 141s as cargo planes left the airbase for the Middle East. They would return only when the war was over the following February. We learned to adapt to war conditions in many ways during that time. Months later at another meeting at Yokota AB, Julian Jones our Asian division director announced the war “must be over”. His fine-tuned ears to plane engines heard the distinct engine noise of a cargo aircraft approach and land. I was impressed. He listened and then announced to us all “the war must be over, the planes are coming back”. Wow! He was correct.

I wanted to understand more about military operations and soon would. The U.S. Pacific Theater was vast – I had no idea of these facts before that time. UMUC had most of the education contracts at the military bases that included: many parts of Japan – estimated 25,000 U.S. military personnel, South Korea, with 30,000 U.S. military personnel. Many more were

scattered in places in Guam, Australia, South Sea Islands and the Philippines which the U.S vacated soon after I arrived. It is estimated over half a million personnel including contractors and foreign nationals in the Pacific Theater were on the U.S. military payroll in the 1990s. My undergraduate degree in history did not cover our military and foreign policy. I learned much.

I had grown up in Occupied Germany after the war and had a fondness for the U.S. military because of the kindness I experienced from them as a child. It was now a high privilege to teach U.S. military students in Asia and contribute to them in appreciation for their generosity of food given to me as a child – the oranges and peanut butter I remember to this day. It was good to give back in my new role as an educator.

One of the highlights of the Tokyo orientation was the grand welcome celebration at the Black Tea House - a converted grist mill outside of Tokyo. It was an amazing place and an unforgettable evening of a smorgasbord of Japanese delicacies and boisterous social fun. We were greeted by a group of beautiful young kimonoed Japanese women – bowing in unison - who gave us slippers to wear as we removed our shoes to enter. The happy “sake atmosphere” was laced with integrating culture stories of Asia and UMUC. One of the foods presented with great ceremony were tiny bite size crabs in their shell. Julian said they tasted crunchy like popcorn and encouraged us to try them. At the end of the evening, he asked who had eaten them whole. Some of us, including me, raised our hands. Julian smiled and told us that those who tried eating them whole had the adventurous spirit to meet the challenges of teaching in the Asian Division. I passed the test. It was true for me.

I was in my element observing the newness of the place every day. The Japanese food kiosk on base made delicious fresh lunches with crunchy vegetables and savory meats. Outside – in front of the base, demonstrations commemorating the bombing of Nagasaki 45 years earlier were in progress. Local citizens distributed pamphlets written in English and Japanese about the bombings 45 years earlier. The young demonstrators were polite but determined and persistent in confronting the many Americans who walked outside of the airbase. This was one of many anti-American demonstrations I would see while working on U.S. military bases around the world. A “Ring around Yokota” demonstration took place in the spring of 1991 when over 5,000

demonstrators formed a human ring around Yokota AB chanting for Americans to leave.



Traffic jams were common in Tokyo. Long lines of trucks barely moved for hours outside our hotel. The trucks were smaller than the ones I was used to along the I5 corridor on the U.S. west coast. Idle traffic generated impromptu “tire toilets” as drivers would relieve themselves against the tires – with their backs modestly to the public - while waiting for traffic to move again. In those days public urination was common in Korea too as I would learn weeks later. There were many surprises with much to learn even before I started my main purpose – to teach.

A small group of new faculty left Japan on a military C130 early in the morning amid a spectacular rising sun. I was given “photographer privilege” in the cockpit as we flew over Mt Fuji and see into its interior crevice of hiking and camping activities.



My first assignment was South Korea. A small group lead by our Korea area director Larry Hepinstall. We landed at Osan Airbase that was in high military alert when we arrived.

It was a queasy introduction to Korea. Sitting on the lawn while waiting for our bus that would take us to Seoul for our Korean orientation, the lawn came alive with crawling caterpillars. Lesson # 1. Caterpillars thrive in humidity. They were everywhere, crawling on buildings making walls appear to have moving black spots. I learned to stay off the grass and use an umbrella like the Korean women when walking under trees because caterpillars dropped freely and in great quantities from trees.

Arriving at the Eighth Army headquarters that housed our UMUC offices we saw the compound surrounded by members of the Korean military in battle gear. A scary sight. The extra security was anticipating a potential attack by North Korea. To me, it was a visible confirmation of the symbiotic relationship between U.S. forces and South Korea forces. I got used to it, learning much in the next year about Cold War tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

End of part one Asia Division. Next: [Part 2 Teaching in Korea and integrating into multiple cultures.](#)

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