

Memoir 1, “Sketches of UMGC (UMUC) Life: EUROPE 1984 – 1998”

Thirty-three Years of Teaching in the Maryland Overseas Programs

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Sketch 1: Overview Europe, 1984-1998

College Park, Maryland, U.S.A. to Heidelberg, Germany, Summer 1984.

I knew what direction my professional life would take after answering a call from Lois Mohr in College Park. She said: “UMUC would like you to teach in our Overseas Programs, European Division. What do you say?” In a resounding voice, I said “YES. Great!” I had a month to prepare. What a month of transition it was! In August 1984, away I went with 69 other US faculty members, “newbies,” to land in Frankfurt and be met by Joe Arden, UMUC European Division Director. We needed three buses to get from Frankfurt to Heidelberg, the Division’s main office.

There a week-long orientation began, and I met Paula Harbecke, Area Director for Northwest, Germany and other memorable people I’d work with for many years: LeAnn Cragun, John Floyd, David Glaser, Rosemary Hoffmann, John Golembe, Jane McHan, Paul Phillips, Martha Shull and Monika Zwink.

My first assignment was trifold, involving what was called “a split” i.e., teaching on two or more bases. The students I first met on US bases in West Germany at Bitburg, Spangdahlem and Hahn made me take off and soar, like the night-flight take-offs of nearby F-16s.

What a start to teaching and serving active duty military and families in four U. S. military services: Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines, and DoD civilians, to complete the picture.

Reflecting on my long overseas service starting with these assignments in Germany, I worked under four of the six of our campus’s presidents or chancellors, namely, T. Benjamin Massey (1978-1998); Gerald Heeger, (1999-2005); Susan C. Aldridge (2006-2012); and Javier Miyares, (2012-present). I only missed Raymond “Ray” Ehrensberger, the first chancellor of UMUC, (1952-1975), and Stanley Drazek, (1975-1978), his successor.

I lived UMUC history, traditions, and pioneering spirit of outreach in its overseas programs to the hilt. I watched it grow (with such mantras as: “Students First” and “Grow the Good!”) and witnessed the evolution of UMUC technological innovations, applications, programs and course delivery systems. Course delivery ranged from on-site, in- the -field f2f teaching, sometimes in tents, to globally available online courses as now widespread. UMGC today has 90 plus programs, certificates and degrees and has become one of the world’s premiere on-line universities.

My U.S. military students called me at first Dr. Holowenzak, then Doctor Steve, Dr. H. and in the field, just “Doc.” They saw or heard of me as a distance educator and administrator, “going the distance for them,” as an instructor, lecturer, collegiate professor and academic director for education and teaching services.

Right from UMUC’s beginning (1947), we were all “Portable Professors” with diverse backgrounds, degrees and experiences. We, overseas faculty and administrators, agreed to uproot our lives and bring higher education to those who served America wherever needed around the world.

I remember Joe Arden saying, “I have an interesting assignment for you. ‘Downrange’ in Bosnia, teaching our troops.” He went on ... “How about going there?” Yes! Without hesitation or reservation, I responded, definitely, yes! No problem to teach and support our troops there or anywhere!

And so it was, enduring memories from assignments to major U.S. missions and teaching locations, including many adventures and unique experiences: Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm; Operation Provide Comfort; Operation Northern Watch, Turkey; Multi-National Force and Observers in the Sinai; the Peace Implementation Force (IFOR); Operation Joint Endeavor; and then, after coming back to UMUC, in Adelphi, my last assignment before retirement, Operation Appreciation at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Malone House, Washington, D.C. Here we supported the non-medical needs of wounded warriors and their families during their stabilization and rehabilitation care periods.

My approach in all situations was “immersion” in the lives of our troops wherever they were. That meant supporting the mission, providing the best teaching-learning experience possible, understanding the military culture and helping the base chapel communities. Volunteerism and photography were my extra ways into being there with our military. Wherever they were - there I was – actively involved in U.S. Forces, 15 countries and 125 military facilities – remembering their work and capturing their spirit, patriotism and love for America,

Sketch 2: A Portable Supportable Professor - Serving those who served America

Throughout these historic periods and over the decades, Overseas Programs’ members were called, “*Portable Professors*,” “*the Academic Foreign Legion*,” “*Professors without Borders*,” and “*Gyps-scholars*,” among other names.

What is a “Portable Supportable Professor?” - Is it a UMGC Style?

“Portable Supportable Professors” were faculty who, upon finishing one UMUC teaching assignment, could find themselves soon elsewhere in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia, teaching one or

multiple courses in the next eight-week term. The academic year consisted of five such terms. My teaching areas in this wide academic world were education, psychology, mathematics, and computer studies.

As a Portable Supportable Professor, I remember developing a proven time-driven strategy for each assignment. It was called “have duffle-bag will travel,” Yup! I had a duffle bag for all seasons - it was one way to deal with some of the ambiguities along the way.

For example, after landing at Frankfurt / Rhein-Main and reaching the Heidelberg office on a Friday you confirm your new assignment and begin preparation.

- I would grab a duffle bag from my lockers, making sure I took the right one for the season and assignment location. I picked up course books, materials and later on, a computer.
- Then, away, I went by bus, train, plane, car or any combination thereof.
- Get to the teaching site (be it regular and stable or hazardous – no matter). Check into BOQ or set up off site, settle, unpack, then to the sack to sleep, and...
- “Oh my gosh, teach the course”, often the next day, to military members in the field, perhaps at an education center that was just built or being renovated, sometimes starting from the ground up as it was in Bosnia or being taken down at a port site in Saudi Arabia.
- Stay however long to do whatever is needed, sometimes surrounded by mines, booby traps or snipers lurking somewhere with you possibly in their sights; hunkering down for typhoons, ice storms, desert sandstorms or any other weather challenge. The key element in all of this was to handle the challenges, teach the best courses possible and return safely to home base - UMUC main office, Heidelberg, Germany or Tokyo, Japan, ready for the next eight- week term to teach another group of America’s finest active duty military men and women.

Sketch 3.1: The War Years. Journeys into Maturity: UMGC Faculty Civilian Volunteers in War-torn Bosnia.

1996. European Division faculty learn a new military expression – downrange—as U.S. troops are stationed in war zones, and UMUC opens programs in Bosnia, Croatia and Hungary. It was called Operation Joint Endeavor, *Peace Implementation Force*. (IFOR). Located in Bosnia, Tuzla, with teach-overs in war-torn Lukavac and Olivo. Down the road a piece was Sarajevo.

Sketch 3.2: Pre-Deployment. - IFOR Faculty Rotation

“Survival: Booby trap and mine awareness training.”

With duffle bags in hand, one fully equipped, and the other a sleeping bag, I arrived in Hohenfels, Germany, called Tent City in those days. I found the tent I was assigned on rock-solid frozen ground (for

now) – it came complete with a potbelly stove and smokestack, cots for 35 soldiers and a UMUC faculty member.

We were briefed on the military and political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, provided a week-long training course on cold weather conditioning. As if to emphasize the training, the real thing, heavy winds and pouring rains, made our tent cave in at around 1:00 a.m. (We had to divert a waterfall inside the tent before we could sleep again). The training continued with instruction in land mine and booby trap awareness, mine-detonation techniques, explosive devices, ambush methods, snipers and live-fire survival demonstration.



Dr. H. Searching for “trip wires” in far-away (hazardous) places.

The reality of mines came into view during live fire exercises on Friday the last day, when standing on a hilltop, looking into a distant field when three mines were detonated under a military vehicle, BOOM times three. The hood blew off, the engine shot straight into the air, the front axle and wheels flew to the sides. The first word coming to my mind was “VAPOR.”

Soldiers, Maryland faculty, anyone in that vehicle at the time, would have been obliterated in an instant! It could be a friend, colleague or family member who made the ultimate sacrifice of self to God and Country-- in defending freedom and bringing peace in the world.

Later, we walked down to the site to see what was left, A CRATER and vehicle pieces scattered anywhere one looked, a memory one never forgets!

Sketch 3.3: - Military Orders, departure and landing, Bosnia – Herzegovina.

Heidelberg, Germany

My new orders stated: “proceed from UM, Heidelberg, GE to the Education Centers at Lukavac, Bosnia-Herzegovina and return to UM, Heidelberg.”

Actual deployment started at Ramstein, A. B. with the flight to Tuzla (Eagle Base), a military operation known as “Joint Endeavor’ (IFOR). Next, a jeep convoy to Lukavac, Bosnia for a two-month stint at “Camp Punxsutawney.”



Peace Implementation Force
Flags of Nations



Dr. H. with ACES ESO and Education Staff
Tuzla Base and Lukavac
- Camp Punxsutawney -



Operation Joint Endeavor
- Task Force Eagle -

Once our vehicle was cleared by U. S. security guards, the camp gate opened and a new world appeared, a coal-coke plant the troops called “Disneyland” by day, and “Gotham City,” by night. With the coke conveyors rising and falling, the scene reminded me of a roller coaster back home.



Downrange: Camp Lukavac, Bosnia: “Disneyland by day or Gotham City by night.”

Yes, coal and coke dust were affixed to everything - with particles even in the air you breathe.

I dropped my duffle bag and gear off at the bullet- riddled and mortar- damaged elementary school where I was to live. Inside, I put a couple of broken doors atop four cardboard boxes, and this became my “at home and work desk”, lit by an overhead light and a couple of flashlights.

Sketch 3.4: Lukavac, Camp Punxsutawney. Building an Army Education Center – University and College School House.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, winter - spring, 1996

The combination of my high school, vocational, technical, and college prep courses, seminary years and undergraduate, graduate years and previous work background all merged in Bosnia when I volunteered to help build an Army Education Center Complex for the military students taking UMUC classes.

Picture the Army Education Center complex we built as a plywood and tent schoolhouse. It housed chalkboards; desks, (10’ x 2’ x 27”); benches 10’ x 2’ x 15’ and wood hangers for fifty students. Each hanger had to hold flak vests, helmets and other equipment. Students toted their M-16s into class.

Manny Iglesias, the Education Officer, and I also crafted and hung a 5’x7’ plywood sign with the words shown below on the 4’ x 4 x 10’ wood frame planted firmly into the soil!



Sign on the move to education campus



U. S. Army Troop taking courses “on Campus”



Top: Message to the USA Troops, this is your Education Place!

To make “the campus” complete, and in keeping with the military culture on site, I placed 256 rocks (some shone above) around the perimeter of the complex to give the students a territorial feel that this was our place of learning in the field.

Sketch 3.5: Lukavac, Camp Punxsutawney, the First Weeks.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, winter 1996

Most students taking classes were beginning paths in higher education leading to associate’s or even bachelor’s degrees, this amidst the coke-filled woodland area of Lukavac.

I taught the first UMUC mathematics course in Bosnia. The US Army troops liked seeing their instructors in BDUs, flak vests, helmets. I didn’t carry the M-16 rifle that each soldier carried, of course, but still they thought: “Doctor H is one of us.”

Welcoming the students, I asked them to call me “Doc” or “Dr. H.” They eyed the patched-together room, picked a spot to put their math books down, and ambled over to the specially made hangers that supported their gear. Each returned to their text-book- marked spot, sat down, cracked opened pristine looking math books.



Photos top left & center: **“Welcoming the U.S. Army troops at newly built plywood- tent schoolhouse**
Photo right: **Tutoring a soldier in math in off- campus office, a desk and chairs in a container box.**

“It is good that we as soldiers get to continue our education even though we are on a peacekeeping mission,” wrote student D.D.C. Another student, D.O.H., wrote, “It is a great opportunity for soldiers on deployment. We like to feel that we (soldiers) are accomplishing a personal goal while we are doing a professional job.”

The desire to learn math in field conditions was there! One student said, “I never thought that I would be able to take courses here....But here you are....here we are!”

During my first UMUC mathematics course in Bosnia, I remember thinking that teaching students on a Bosnian deployment is a great honor. In an interview, I told a reporter: “I love being here with the soldiers. I have a lot of respect for them ... They have their mission, their family and on top of that many want to pursue their educational goals.” (Staff Sgt. Brian Boeman, Lukavac, *Attend College, even graduate while on deployment*. “The Iron Sentinel,” May 15, 1996). pp. 5ff.

I used to tell my students that pursuing higher- education goals is investing in yourselves. Education lets you deal with the real world's future uncertainties and ambiguities.

Fast forward: One of UMUC students did complete his last course in Bosnia to earn his bachelor's degree, and was congratulated by UMUC President, Dr. Massey at the UMGC commencement ceremony in Heidelberg.

Sketch 3.6: Camp Lukavac, Math study habits of soldiers

Bosnia-Herzegovina, winter-spring 1996

Where did students study outside the classroom? I wandered all around Camp Lukavac to find out. The answer, wherever they could! This was a secure camp, a mechanized camp of tanks, howitzers, personal carriers, and jeeps. lots of grease needed to keep things running.

Students often carried math books in backpacks, rucksacks, or duffle bags. They would pull them out wherever and whenever they could and hunker down to solve math problems while off-duty: in dining halls, P.T. sites, waiting in line at telephone banks to call their loved ones at home. Sometimes they even did math inside armored personnel carriers.



Student with math book and M-16 close at hand, waiting to phone home

Since many soldiers worked in the mechanized units, over the weeks of the course, I could see the grease stains from hands permeate their math book - cover to cover, page after page - as they solved problems found in each chapter.

The soldiers were # 1 in my book. For them, you do whatever you can, mentor each, when needed, so that the knowledge they gain is theirs to keep and use. I had my office in a storage container that came off some ship. Swing open box doors and there was my desk and two chairs ready for math teaching, learning, counseling – let the session begin!

Sketch: 3.7: The Night the Chow Hall Blew Up

Bosnia – Herzegovina, winter – spring 1996.

Lukavac, **Bosnia** - Camp Punxsutawney

Hundreds of troops were enjoying “good grub” at the Camp Punxsutawney, chow hall on Tuesday evening May 8. Everyone went back to quarters, except the cooks for the morning shift. The kitchen staff stayed up to prepare breakfast, and suddenly, BOOM, a gasoline-fueled M-2 burner fire exploded in the dining facility. Chain- reaction blasts shook the earth, sending fire balls into the skies in the early morning



Top left: **Inside devastated kitchen cooking area**



Top right: **Outside: Building and chow hall area**

Now, 1200 troops were without a dining facility. MREs (military field ration packets) became the main course for breakfast, lunch and dinner instead of cooked food! Brown and Root (BR) Engineering came to the rescue! They built a new chow hall in three days (May 9-12, 1996) working around the clock. The BR construction company, its managers and skilled employees working as a team, produced a new kitchen and dining tents for all. The first hot meals were dished out the evening of May 12.



Top. **Celebrating the new dining facility**

Reference: Steiner, C. (May 15, 1996). *People help people after the dining facility fire*. “Iron Sentinel”. 1 & 6.

Sketch 3.8: Lukavac, Camp Punxsutawney. A Soldier's Story.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, winter-spring 1996

After I had closed the door to the schoolhouse in Bosnia one evening, a soldier came out of the dark and into its light. He asked: "Dr. H., I've been reassigned and must leave tomorrow to another location, can't finish your course, but can I have one of your schoolhouse rocks to take with me?" "Sure thing! Let's pick one out tomorrow around 10:00 a.m. before you leave." He came back the next day, selected a rock, and I asked him to sign it; he did, and he thanked me for teaching the class and took the rock with him as a remembrance of the schoolhouse and his Maryland course.

Sketch 3.9: Dr. Rocky & Friends at Camp Punxsutawney, Lukavac, Bosnia, spring 1996

When the first UMUC mathematics class in Bosnia was almost over, I told the class, next time we meet, you can pick one of the rocks, sign your name along with Math 100 and Bosnia 1996, and take it home with you as a remembrance of the first UMUC math class in Bosnia. When they came back, I distributed marker pens, they picked the rock of choice then signed and dated their souvenirs.



**Class members sign off: taking the first UMUC mathematic field course in Bosnia:–
Investing in themselves and their future,**

One soldier shouted: "you are the most soldier-oriented professor I've ever had." Another soldier shouted out "Thanks, Dr. Rocky, Thanks!"

I did like that thought and name! Went over and picked up my own rock, signed it and said: "let's get them all together and give the collection the name, "Dr. Rocky and Friends in Bosnia – 1996."



*Emmy Winner Documentary: University of Maryland University College. "A Maryland State of Mind: Bullets, Books and Bosnia." Kenneth Day, Producer and Everett Jackson, Photojournalist. (as shown Maryland Public Television: primetime September 1996).

Sketch 3.9: Olovo, Camp Linda Base,” Come teach my soldiers - I’ll show you the best beach party in Bosnia.”

Bosnia-Herzegovina, spring 1996

I was finishing my math course when a soldier burst into the plywood tent classroom. He said: “let me introduce myself, I’m Command Sgt. Maj. (CCMS) William Gainey. Doc, I heard a lot of good things about you, come teach my soldiers at Camp Linda Base, and you can participate in the best beach party in Bosnia next Tuesday evening.” Yes - it was! I walked out the main gate, down the road-a-piece, stop, and there it was --Da Dah-- the best sandbags’ operation anywhere around. From sand piles to 14,000 filled bags heaved onto two flat-bed trucks driven back into the base, to designated sites and stacked to surround the base facilities to prevent soldiers (and Maryland teachers) being shot at and possibly wounded or killed by snipers.



Top center: **“The best beach party in Bosnia!**



14,000 filled bags and placed!

Fast forward, after successfully finishing, the same Command Sgt. Major said: “Thanks for teaching our troops, if I owned this place I’d give you the keys to it - come on over and pitch some horseshoes tomorrow.” I did come and pitched horseshoes. Afterwards, he shook my hand and placed in it a coin-like commemorative medallion. “Thanks again.” Later that week, the Base Commander called me to his office and gave me his “Silver Medallion” and a Command Scroll, designating me a Friend of the Regiment – “For Excellence in Service.”

Thank you for reading Memoir 1



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*The photos throughout memoirs are Compliments of the Stephen Holowenzak Photo Collections. (1984-1998).

What came next in “teaching and serving those who serve?” Assignment: The Middle East!
