

Sketches of UMGC (UMUC) Life: Middle East 1988 – 1998, Memoir 2

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As many of us know, in addition to being academic foreign legionnaires, gypsy scholars, and professors without borders, we were sometimes “the Lone UMUC Faculty Ranger”, teaching and supporting troops at “far-away places with strange sounding names.” (Arden, July 2004).

Going great distances to teach almost anywhere included for me: adaptation, reflection, inspiration, transformation and faith. It also meant teaching the best courses I could for my students, leaving behind goodwill and farewell blessings and returning to Frankfurt/ Heidelberg ready to move on to another far-away place.

It was during the 1988-1998 period of my Middle East teaching that Dr. T. Benjamin Massey was President of UMUC, and Maryland Overseas Programs were under the leadership of Drs. Joe Arden, Europe, and Paula Harbecke, Asia. My Area Directors in Europe were David Glaser and Jane Mchan.

Sketch 1.0. 1990-1991. The Gateway to Gulf Rest Stop: Rhein-Main A. B., “Operation Desert Shield” experiences.

I was living along with other Overseas Maryland faculty at Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, teaching in or around Frankfurt when a huge, around- the -clock build- up of U. S. cargo planes, Air Force attack jets and bombers started. All were bound for the Persian Gulf.

With massive numbers of military personnel and assets (pieces of equipment) coming into base, we had to vacate our BOQ accommodation immediately. This was the War in the Gulf, “Operation Desert Storm,” that lead to the liberation of Kuwait on February 26, 1991. Fast forward, about a year later, after teaching soldiers at the Helmstedt Berlin Brigade, (troops assigned to Check Point Charlie) and at Clay-McNair, Barracks, West Berlin, I volunteered to teach in the Gulf. The orders I received from the Department of the Army read, “You are invited to proceed from Washington D.C. to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, on March 2, 1992 to provide educational services in support of Operation Desert Storm.”

Sketch 1.1 U.S. Department of Army, "Calling Dr. Holowenzak" "Operation Desert Storm."

1992. What an honor! I recalled boarding the C-141 Star-lifter that carried troops, a UMUC professor (me) and three jet engines to King Abdul Aziz Air Base, Dhahran – and into the "sands of time." I arrived and reported to teach and support U. S. troops in Persian Gulf and Desert Storm in Southwest Asia. I became involved in the military mission, education, and community life of active duty military members serving in Dhahran and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait.

Sketch 1.2 King Abdul Aziz Air Base Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Khobar Towers Complex* -

*Note: This was the same complex, where on June 25, 1996, terrorists detonated a tanker truck filled with explosives by Bldg.13 (eight stories tall) killing 19 Airmen and leaving more than 350 injured.

Once on base, I moved into living quarters known as the Khobar Towers Military Housing Complex - initially built to move Bedouins tribes out of the sand and into a more regulated community life. It was now a troop placement and staging area.

The next morning, I was met by Mr. Dennis Schofield, Education Officer (ESO) at the Army Education Center who introduced his staff, showed me the UMUC classrooms and computer lab area and assigned me a Jeep to get around the huge base.



The Army and UMUC Center Team – In Soldiers Service

Amazing what sand will do!

Mr. Scofield and I shared an interest in carpentry, building things out of wood. Our first project we needed before classes started: make a large Army Center for Education Services (ACES) sign to hang from the Education Center’s fourth-floor suite balcony so that soldiers could see it from afar.

We did it! The sign served its purpose – anyone within the Khobar Towers area could see it, come to the ACES offices, register and take courses. Successful students could now say with pride: “even deployed to the Persian Gulf, I could continue my education.

Mr. Schofield received permission to take UMUC faculty and staff on a walkthrough of the Patriot Radar guided anti-missile carriers, called the scud busters, designed to intercept and destroy enemy missiles aimed at Tel Aviv during Desert Storm. What an experience!



Scud busters from Afar and Close up!

Sketch 2.0 1994. Assignment Camp Doha after the “Liberation of Kuwait”

2.1. The Kuwait City Army Airport Operations Facility.

This was a small check-in shack located in a remote area of the airport. Once cleared, we rode an Army military bus 30 miles to Camp Doha, where an off-base billboard sign read: “Welcome to Camp Doha, U.S. Army Training and Security, Kuwait.”



Airport Operations



Welcome to Education Center



Dr. Holowenzak with Col. Kennedy

Less welcoming, a tank faced visitors, a soldier standing behind its machine gun, cross hairs fixed on vehicles waiting to enter. Security guards boarded our bus to check the IDs and authorization papers of all on board.

Sketch 2.2. Life on Base.

Once cleared and inside the base, I was brought to my UMUC designated quarters – a prefabricated duplex house structure, (pending arrival- on a flat-bed truck – later that day), section one –

my living quarters and section two - the MOS library. About one hundred yards away was a warehouse area housing the Base Community Chapel, the Doha Army Education Center and the Base Exchange.



Base Headquarters



Chapel, Exchange & recreation areas.



Doha Army Education Center

The next morning, I was greeted by Catherine Gutierrez, the Doha Army Education Service Officer, who briefed me on the programs and classes being taught at the center, introduced me to her ACES staff and showed me the classroom and computer lab areas where I would be teaching, both at the Camp Doha Base Library. Here I was the entire UMUC faculty. At this site, and consistent with other remote sites where I taught, much needed to be done. All was accomplished by the end of my teaching assignment, including: the renovating offices, classrooms, computer labs and upgrading the UMUC computers; hardware and software and reorganizing the base library.

Before leaving Kuwait, the Education Center put together a surprise luncheon to thank me for my contributions to meeting the command educational mission objectives. I received a Department of the Army Commander's Award for Civilian Public Service (10 Oct. 94) and accompanying medal.

Sketch 3.0 Sinai Calling.

Thanks to UMUC for great assignments and experiences in the desert, 1994-1995! After arriving in Cairo, Egypt, for my new assignment, I boarded the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) bus to a place called El Gora, escorted by two Egyptian armored personnel carriers, each manned by four armed security guards. Sometimes the MFO bus was used for target practice by snipers since it was white and had painted, on both broad sides, a huge orange peace symbol of a dove carrying an olive branch. The two escorts, one in front and one in back, provided us with some reassurance through Egypt to the ferry boat that would carry the bus across the Suez Canal onto the Sinai Peninsula. Five hours later we arrived in El Gora, Egypt, "Moses' Valley" and MFO North Camp.



Sinai Peninsula maps (left and right) with Multinational Force and Observers symbol (center)

Sketch 3.1. 1994 -1995 North Camp and Multi-National Force and Observers (MFO).

MFO is the military and civilian peace- keeping organization present in the Sinai with its mission (since 1982) to enforce the 1979 Camp David Accords that brought about peace between Egypt and Israel.

As I was arriving for my teaching assignments (mathematics and computer studies) at both North Camp (close to Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem, Israel) and South Camp, further afield, Mr. Reginal Saville, the Education Service Officer at the Army Center of Educational Services came out to meet and welcome me at the security gate. Protected by defensive towers, armed guards, barriers and barbed wire, I was glad to see him. He drove me to Building 80.4, Room 14 – a 10' x 12' x 7' high space, containing a bunk, desk/chair, clothes locker and small ice box /refrigerator. Months later, Mr. Saville had a one -month U.S, Reserve duty back in the States and asked me to manage the Education Center, handle military students' requests and keep the computer lab open and secure extra days during his absence – which I did! He was one happy ESO when he returned and passed that on to the Command.

In addition to the management and teaching of the Battalion's military members, I had the experience of doing PT with the force, attending military functions and exercises involving all national contingents, and, especially, participating and contributing to the major annual MFO Force {Military} Skills Competition. What a unique military Olympics-type event it turned out to be!

Sketch 3.2. MFO Force Skills Competition. U.S. Army Battalion matters through the lens of Dr. H.

How many UMUC professors can say they ran ahead of the 1st. U.S. military support team as they met the 20 major obstacle challenges in the week-long MFO Force Skills course competition? A rigorous,

realistic, and grueling individual and team effort, it required focused and intensive training six months prior to the competition.

MFO Competition included: knowledge skills, MFO mission and principles, desert survival skills, map reading, first aid, mine awareness and reporting and two major Challenge Course Areas. These were: 1. mission resupply skills and 2. obstacle course skills. All this was followed by a two-mile run and fire-arms skills and target shoot.

I was one of the field photographers who captured these men and women in action in the resupply and obstacle course competitions. Are you curious, as to what the challenge skills were? Let's go!

❖ Resupply course – Teams: five soldiers each in BDUs hauling objects to the front lines.

Objects and supplies: 3 planks, 3 water cans: 2 @ 50 lbs. each and 1 @ 70 lbs.; 4 poles and 1 tent.

Carry the above objects across a pile, on, over and through a conduit pipe ¼ filled with water; pull objects under barbed wire, over a sand hill; swing across an open pit carrying the items; and race ¼ mile to the finish line.



Force Skills: Set up



Navigating the course!



Getting into the swing on things!

❖ Physical obstacle course. – Teams of five soldiers in BDUs, boots, and carrying their government issued M-16s, tackle and overcome barriers confronted : surmount elevated stone pile-on; climb over a 6' wall; crawl under 20' long barbed wire; run over a hill; swing across a pit with objects; walk across elevated 4" x 4" beams; straddle hand over hand object; crawl through a conduit pipe; climb over a 20' wall; walk across an elevated 30' tri-wire bridge; pull and slide self across a 30' long rope carrying an M-6; and run across the finish line.



20 foot wall challenge!



Over the wall –success!

The high rope with M-16s challenge!



The command asked me to run around the course multiple times, staying ahead of the U.S Teams, photographing their movements and actions over four days of events. I shot 780 pictures, lost three pounds and had a great couple of days in the field with the US Army Support Battalion. In brief, I saw the teams as purpose driven, relentless in their pursuits, inspirational, and victorious in their actions and accomplishments.

Days later, while teaching, my students told me they saw me with my camera running around the Force Skill course and were rooting for me. “There’s Dr. H. running around the course again with our team.”

One soldier after class, came up to me, and said, “Dr. H., you’re the most soldier- orientated professor I’ve ever had!” I said, “thank you for the sacrifices you are making every day for God and Country and making the world a better and safer place.”

In an outdoor ceremony before 250 soldiers following the completion of the MFO competition among 11 countries, the commander of U.S .1st Support Battalion presented me a Certificate of

Appreciation and Commander's Medallion for Excellence for "Supporting Peace through the Multi-National Force and Observers."

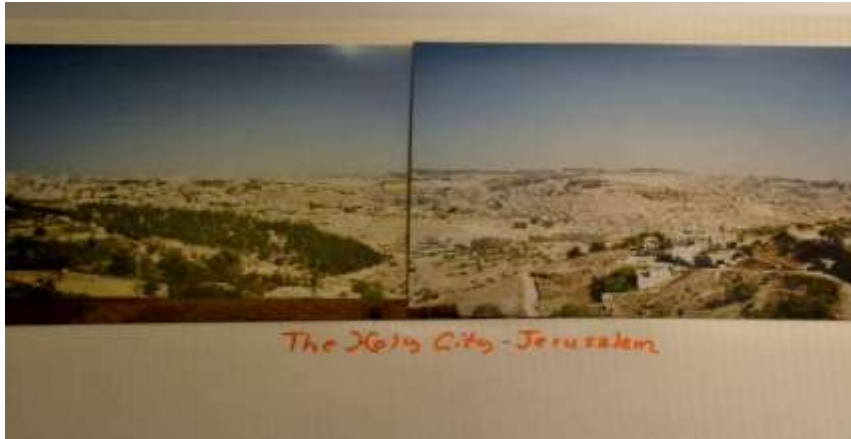
Sketch 3.3. Jerusalem – MFO Business and Community Pilgrimage that matters.

While teaching at North camp, I was able to visit and stay in Jerusalem since there were regularly scheduled special buses each week that travelled between El Gora, Egypt and Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in Israel. The journeys to Jerusalem were sometimes uneventful, other times tense, and occasionally dangerous because of snipers and land mines left by terrorists. Common to all this travel was its unpredictability. It all depended on where you were, and the time of day, down to the second (example: the Tel-Aviv bus depot attack, January 5, 2003.)

There were times I stayed with the MFO troops at the Notre Dame Center, across the street from the New Gate entrance to the Old City, one of eight entrance gates into its four Quarters. At other times, I stayed inside the Old City gates at a Franciscan hospitality House, "Casa." - The Friars guided pilgrims on visits to Holy Shrines and other locations.

When one looks at the Middle East through the eyes of a UMUC faculty member on the scene, it's especially clear that Egypt and Israel are the meeting point of three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. Egypt and Israel are fascinating countries filled with unending possibilities -ancient and modern peoples, history, diverse cultures and religions, art and archeology.

Jerusalem. A city having two distinct parts; the Old City enclosed within the city wall - named, the Holy City, the Eternal City, the City of David, Zion and many others), and the modern city which grows daily beyond the city walls. Maybe no city in the world means so much too so many people as Jerusalem.



Jerusalem Perspective – The Holy City from afar!

One really must walk the cobblestones streets and narrow alleys, take in the sights, sounds and smells all around to get a feel for the place. In winter, a Christian would naturally think “Peace on earth to people of good will” while in spring time, thoughts turn to Gethsemane, the Way of the Cross, Calvary, the Resurrection and Salvation of mankind - a spiritual experience of a life time when one thinks of the Bible – The Old Testament and New Testament – Its overpowering, “God is here.”

I could sense a significant change in my own life as I walked inside the Walled City and mingled with the people in the various quarters: Christian (the Via Dolorosa “The Way of the Cross” going to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Edicula – Tomb of Jesus); Jewish Quarter (the Western Wall); Muslim Quarter (Dome of the Rock). No other place on earth is like this sacred ground to the three Abrahamic religions. It is here that one can stop in each of the Quarters, bow one’s head in silence and pray for a better world, united in peace, and afterwards, sense the blessings, bestowed to carry on for a better tomorrow. A pilgrimage to the Holy Land is a great way to bring about a powerful, life- changing experience.

Sketch 3.4. 1994 -1995. Sinai, South Camp, Sharm -el- Sheikh. - The next UMGC workplace.

Back to teaching, reaching South Camp from North Camp, my next assignment, I needed to fly on the French contingent’s twin-engine aircraft, “The Otter,” with a flight crew of a pilot & co-pilot and 14 passengers. The flight time was 1.5 hrs. flying the sunshine route morning time and late afternoon route back with its shadows over the Gulf of Aqaba, the Sinai mountains on your left and the turquoise waters below home to 30 varieties of native fish.



Aircraft check-out procedures underway!



Taxing to runway!



And away we go! – Up! Up! & AWAY!

Reaching South Camp, I became again a Lone UMUC Ranger teaching solo at the site and later providing support to the Regiment in their field training and exercises.



: South Camp Checkpoint



Dr. H. Education Ctr. and Students - Remote site



Training Instruction



Arms fire practice



Performance testing

Off-base UMUC teaching and learning.

Vintage choppers resupplied the troops and shuttled a UMUC professor to soldiers living on an isolated island outpost somewhere in the Red Sea. One would buckle-up and peer out over the open chopper doors at the schools of coral fish down under the blue green waters of Red Sea. Once on the outpost, I would be fascinated watching an actual ‘Resupply Operation Drop’ featuring the chopper pilot, skillful coordination, and execution of supply delivery.



Island teaching hopping!



Remote site teaching



Instructor and student



Do you see what I see?



Now that's a chopper re-supply coming!



A chopper pilot, skillful coordination, and supply delivery operation!

Sketch 3.5. Sinai, Mount Sinai – St. Catherine, Army “The Stairs of Repentance,” and the ‘Promise Land’

The U, S. Army Community Base Chapel made a special historical and educational Passover and Easter weekend pilgrimage. The chaplain, base community members, including myself and a few U.S / UMGC students in my class went to St. Catherine, the famous Greek Orthodox monastery, and we walked, trekked and hiked paths over rocks, boulders, up the 3,750 hundred “Steps of Repentance,” through mountains with towering peaks, to the Garden of the Prophets. We viewed a beautiful sunrise over bluish mountains to see the “Promised Land,” remembering that Old Testament historic event in which the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and through him to mankind.



Catherine, the famous Greek Orthodox monastery, Sinai, and the Burning bush of the Old Testament



The Steps of Repentance (n=3,750) to the Garden of the Prophets,



The beautiful sunrise over bluish mountains to see the "Promised Land,"

Sketch 4.0. Incirlik. A. B. Turkey, known as "Operation Northern Watch, (ONW), The Combined Task Force, near Adana, Turkey. A hazardous assignment with a humanitarian outreach component.

What does a rooster, escort jets from USAF 22nd Fighter Squadron F-16CJs, one E-3 Sentry (AWACS) and two guardian angels have in common? Answer: my wakeup call at the UMUC apartment house across the street from the Incirlik base main entrance. A great awakening to the start of each day!

Background. Heidelberg staff assigned me to this base in Turkey. I taught my repertory of IFSM, CMIS and CAPP courses. As at other bases, I continued to do volunteer work at command functions, events and humanitarian outreach causes undertaken by Incirlik Community Base Chapel in impoverished areas of the nearby city of Adana. One humanitarian outreach effort touched an Armenian family whose father had been severely injured in a truck accident, his wife and their seven children. One of their little girls needed several corrective operations on her left leg. The family lived in a two- story, dilapidated building having three small rooms - a bedroom, a tiny, decrepit kitchen, and living room where the children slept. It was heated by an antiquated potbelly stove. The first- floor rooms were uninhabitable due to major water leakage problems, affecting walls, ceilings and windows.



Housing area



Entrance to home



Severe wall water/ceiling damage



Family members with Re, Moran & team member



Chapel men's group with Fr. Moran



Outside security and repair



Patch- up work



Outdoor preparation



Daughter waving Hi and Thanks!



Men's Group with father and children

The family was about to be evicted, unable to pay rent due to the father's injury, hospitalization and rehabilitation. Without income, the family was seriously in need of assistance.

Fr. Edward Moran, Chaplain at Incirlik Community Base Chapel, initiated the humanitarian outreach with the Pastor of St. Paul Church in Adana to help remedy the situation. Father Moran organized a chapel men's work group (of which I and few of my students were a part) to resolve the problems confronting the family.

He arranged with the landlord that the men's group would repair the two -story house and provide appliances in return for which rent would be covered for the family. After two months of work the first- floor walls, floors and ceilings, electrical and outside concrete walkways were fixed, and the family could now live in the building for the next two years.

Also, the little girl was able to have the rehabilitation operations needed to lengthen one leg to the same length as the other, so she could walk without crutches. This came through the generosity of Chapel funds raised from members attending services. Their donations covered her treatment.

Closing Remarks

And so it was with UMUC Overseas Programs, European Division, Middle East locations. I have enduring and endearing memories of assignments to major U.S. missions and was happy to have completed my teaching in all kinds of circumstances, enjoying adventures in faraway places in the Middle East. Next stop Maryland's Asian Division!

See my third memoir, Life in Asia, 1998-2006.