

RPCV WRITERS & Readers

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers write about their world

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SPECIAL ISSUE

To preserve and to learn

FOR OVER EIGHT YEARS *RPCV Writers & Readers* has been highlighting the writings of returned Peace Corps Volunteers and staff. Through the recognition and encouragement of Peace Corps writers this publication hopes to promote the Third Goal of the Peace Corps. The writings of RPCVs and staff, all their novels, short stories, essays and poetry are a positive way of educating Americans about the world. And just as surviving letters, journals, and official papers that provided Ken Burns with material for his Civil War documentary, another function of this newsletter is to preserve for future historical use some of the formal and informal written record of the Peace Corps.

While *RPCV Writers & Readers* has published some great essays since 1989, we have never focused our attention on the single piece of prose that in many ways launched and buoyed the agency — "A Towering Task." This paper, written by Warren Wiggins with Bill Josephson, was sent to Sargent Shriver in early 1961 as he was in the beginning stages of designing the organization that would be called the Peace Corps.

In this time of mistrust of government, little civic education for our children, and even wide-ranging public estrangement from the whole notion of "We the people . . .," the very idea of a confident and bold government program proposing "quantum jumps" and "large dimensions" seems remote, exotic. But there may be lessons in "A Towering Task" for this era of smaller government.

In this special issue of *RPCV Writers & Readers*, we look at "A Towering Task," talk with Warren Wiggins and hear from some who were there at the beginning with Wiggins, and some who have served with the best foreign assistance program the United States has ever had.



Warren Wiggins

One good idea deserves another . . .

RPCV WRITERS & READERS WANTS to do more than just preserve our history, however. In the spirit of "A Towering Task" we are asking: What might be next for the Peace Corps?

This spring, Peace Corps Director Mark Gearan will convene a conference on the

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A TOWERING TASK

I. INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT TREND OF THINKING AND PROPOSALS

President Kennedy's desire to establish a National Peace Corps to assist peoples of underdeveloped countries obviously has struck an extremely responsive chord in America. The press, college students, private foundations, international volunteer and relief services and the trade unions have all reacted favorably, indeed enthusiastically, to the proposal. Public meetings and conferences to discuss the many aspects of a Peace Corps have been held on a variety of proposals, have been well attended, and indicate widespread public support for the proposal.

In June 1960 Senator [Hubert] Humphrey introduced a bill for the establishment of a "Peace Corps." Representative [Henry] Reuss of Wisconsin and the late Senator [Richard Lewis] Neuberger also introduced a bill, which was subsequently passed as an amendment to the Mutual Security Act, which calls for a study concerning the establishment of a Peace Corps. Professor Maurice Albertson of the Colorado State University Research Foundation, the ICA [International Cooperation Administration, the precursor to USAID] contractor for this study, is to complete the study by March 1 [1961].

At President Kennedy's suggestion, Max Millikan of the Center for International Studies at MIT recently submitted a report to President Kennedy recommending the establishment of a Peace Corps.

The apparent unanimity of favorable response at home and abroad, when coupled with President Kennedy's strong belief in the National Peace Corps concept and his formal proposal for such a Corps in his State of the Union address, indicates that a National Peace Corps will be established. The question then is what are to be its scope and timing. (It is indeed surprising

that *all* public response has been positive. Those who may have doubts have only advocated caution in proceeding, not rejection of the proposal on its merits.)

While it seems to be true that some of those without experience in the management of overseas activities appear to minimize certain aspects of the difficulty of rapidly and effectively implementing this proposal, many with overseas experience tend to be overly cautious in their approach to it.

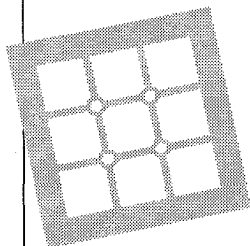
Most of the academic and other institutional approaches to the opportunity of the National Peace Corps suggest tentative pilot projects, involving small numbers of people and consequently a limited political, economic and psychological impact. This cautious approach is proposed by many because of the clear possibility of a fiasco. The organization and administration of a large number of Americans working on a variety of programs and projects in many countries with varying cultures and needs undeniably is an extremely complex and difficult undertaking. It is the prevailing view that if a great many Americans are scattered abroad and if significant numbers of them fail either in their own eyes or in the eyes of the recipient peoples, or if large numbers of the Americans have severe health, emotional or other problems, the resulting criticism will extend far beyond the project *per se*.

Thus, as far as can be ascertained, most of the individuals and groups who are in a position to advise President Kennedy counsel caution and a slow beginning. However, some elements of the trade unions are suggesting that President Kennedy think in terms of large numbers.

Generally speaking, those who are experienced are the most cautious. Many voluntary organizations with youths now abroad suggest that in the next year or so, if governmental financing were available,

F.Y.I.

On March 1, 1961 President John Kennedy issued an Executive Order creating the Peace Corps.



they could double the number of youths in their overseas programs. This would mean adding about 500 more youths to existing projects. Many International Cooperation Administration employees suggest expanding existing projects by adding youths as an extra personnel complement, thus making the "expert" more effective and going projects more efficient. Suggestions from the Department of State on the Peace Corps are indeed rare (presumably political problems abroad that might arise from such a Corps overshadow any latent ideas). Professor Albertson, after his initial and preliminary survey and consultation with interested individuals and groups, informally suggested (about January 10, 1961) that perhaps something like 1,000 or 2,000 additional people might be sent abroad during 1961 under all facets of this program, including an expansion of the activity through the voluntary groups. Congressman Reuss recently suggested beginning at a 2,000-man level with a possible potential growth of the Corps to 10,000.

Thus, one course of action is becoming clear and apparently has the support of most people expressing an opinion: Proceed cautiously, start with small pilot projects, don't make mistakes, limit the program to 1,000 or 2,000 for a beginning (some say a few hundred), don't let this experiment get out of hand — in other words, find out the appropriate dimensions of the program by cautious exploration.

II. UNITED STATES MOTIVATIONS FOR A NATIONAL PEACE CORPS

Before attempting to assess present thinking about the Peace Corps, it appears essential to attempt to list the fundamental motivations for this activity. The following is neither all-inclusive nor mutually exclusive, but probably covers the main types of justification for the Peace Corps:

1. PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENT ABROAD. Many Americans feel that there is a necessity to add another "tool" or "resource" to those presently available for accomplishing needed changes abroad. Not only do we need to bring another kind of asset to bear on our foreign problems, there is an urgency in these problems that demands we move

more quickly. The National Peace Corps is a program that will allow the United States to move faster in many situations. This progress often requires the availability of large numbers of personnel, which would be provided under this program. The National Peace Corps would provide another way to expand education, to build a road, to promote 4-H Clubs, or to eradicate malaria. As such it holds forth the promise of potential accomplishment abroad of great importance to America.

2. TRAINING AND RECRUITING GROUND FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES. A second valuable contribution of the Peace Corps would be as a training and recruiting ground for future members of USIS, ICA, DLF, the Department of State, the foundations, business firms, etc.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ABROAD OF AMERICAN YOUTH "PITCHING IN" TO WORK ABROAD. Many National Peace Corps supporters claim that the greatest of benefits will occur as the people of other countries observe our youth helping other people to dig ditches, teach schools, and build feeder roads. Aside from completing a project, the greatest impact is said to be that America will be better understood, better liked, etc.

4. IMPACT ON AMERICAN SOCIETY AND AMERICAN ATTITUDES. Less discussed but perhaps of great significance is the possibility that as Americans serve abroad over a period of time they become more oriented to the world scene and are better prepared to participate in world affairs. Many draw a parallel to the impact of American attitudes of having 14 million Americans under arms in World War II, a considerable portion of whom served abroad.

5. AMERICAN YOUTH WANTS TO SERVE ABROAD. The simple fact that youth wants to serve abroad is perhaps the most important ingredient in describing the present national motivation. The magnitude of response by young Americans to the proposition of the National Peace Corps has yet to be fully ascertained, but certainly the preliminary indications are that the response, especially in the universities and colleges, is large and growing. This desire represents a composite of many emotions, feelings and attitudes. Some of this motivation comes from a desire for creative "adventure" in foreign lands, some from a

F.Y.I.

On December 31,
1961 there were 750
Peace Corps
Volunteers overseas.
As of June 30, 1962
there were 2,816
Volunteers in the field.
By June 30, 1963 that
number had risen to
6,646.

high sense of altruism and desire to serve in a noble cause, assisting other peoples to obtain a better life, some comes from the possible relation of the Peace Corps to draft deferment, and some no doubt from a sense of boredom and frustration with present environment. In any case, from the United States Government point of view, this strong desire to "serve abroad" must be seriously considered.

6. "POLITICAL" MOTIVATION. From a combination of the above considerations, it is clear that this proposed program has political support and is politically important. This "derived" motivation is listed here because it is in the "political" forum that the other motivations will produce the concrete results under consideration here. Religious, philanthropic and foundation-type institutions have already initiated their "youth corps" programs with their own criteria in mind. What is now under consideration is the National Peace Corps that would be sponsored by the United States Government and developed by political bodies.

III. A FEW MAJOR DIFFICULTIES WITH PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS

The following considerations of the preliminary proposals are offered with the realization that it is not yet fully appropriate to examine the proposals made to date since, in most cases, they represent but "approaches" to the subject, not full-blown, well-developed courses of action. Nonetheless, there is an almost universal tendency toward the conclusions indicated in Part I above, and such conclusions may well be imbedded in decisions by the administration and in legislation considered by the Congress in the next few weeks or months. Thus it is believed necessary to attempt to assess the developments to date even though only a few have been crystallized in concrete proposals of action.

The first major difficulty with most of the thinking that has been expressed to date (as summarized in Part I above) is that if the overall program is launched at the 1,000 to 2,000-youth level, it will be more likely to fail in the absolute sense than at a level, say, five or ten times greater. Generally speaking, such small numbers won't be signifi-

cant enough in the recipient countries to get the governmental and institutional attention it needs. Exceptions can, of course, be found, but it is believed that they will be rare. Sending 100 students to a Latin American country won't be important enough to get presidential support from that country. Active support from a Minister of Agriculture, Health or Education would be surprising as a general rule. And if the country needed to give legislative or financial support, it might not be forthcoming. However, 1,000 or 5,000 Americans, working on something important in a *single* country, would merit considerably more political, administrative and financial support. One hundred youths engaged in agricultural work of some sort in Brazil might pass by unnoticed, except for the problems involved, but 5,000 American youths helping to build Brasilia might warrant the full attention and support of the President of Brazil himself.

Likewise, if a program of 100 youths were to be launched in a Far Eastern country (with, say, 30 arriving the first year), it might be negotiated by an Ambassador who would be thinking: 1) What can 100 youths do? 2) What will Washington think of next? 3) We have too many Americans here in this country, anyway; 4) What a terrible chance we are taking with all these kids; 5) I wonder if the Foreign Minister will pay any attention to it — and if he doesn't, maybe we won't have a Peace Corps program here after all; and 6) If he does, maybe we can keep the number down to 30 and cancel out the additional youths contemplated for the second year.

However, if the program is launched at a considerably higher level and selected countries can receive a number large enough to do an important *national* job, it will merit attention abroad and won't be just another annoyance to the Foreign Office — it will have the potential of developing into a major asset of mutual importance.

To some extent, there may be a parallel set of circumstances in the United States. A program of 1,000 or so youths may not merit sufficient administrative and legislative attention to overcome the very real difficulties in this complex program. A small program may become mired down in the application of routine rules, regulations and priorities.

Let us suppose the Marshall Plan had been started a year or two earlier than 1948 when the "need" for massive effort was not as clear and that the proposal would have been for a two-year, \$2 billion program rather than a four-year, \$17 billion program. Paul Hoffman probably wouldn't have been its Director — the influx of able talent to assist him would not have occurred in the magnitude it did — the Congress might not have created a separate agency to handle the job, but instead might have asked the Department of State to administer the resources with an advisory committee — Europe would never have formed the OEEC — the Russian attitude might have been quite different. Two years later (1948), when the real, larger need became apparent, the program might have been in disrepute and the Congress might then have turned it down. Thus, history might have recorded the European Recovery Program as a failure because it wasn't started on a scale sufficiently large to enable the United States and the European countries to "handle it right."

In other words, it is here postulated that a "small," "cautious" National Peace Corps may be worse than no Peace Corps at all. It may not receive the attention and talent it will require even for preventing trouble. A slow, cautious start may maximize the chance of failure. A small, cautious National Peace Corps may be a diversionary path of inconsequential accomplishment (see below) and major administrative and diplomatic trouble.

The second major difficulty is that the small-contingents concept is limited in scope to such a degree that it probably makes little difference whether or not we have a Peace Corps.

There are at least 60 countries eligible to receive the Corps. Let us suppose it grows from a starting-year size of 500 or 1,000 youths to 5,000 by the end of President Kennedy's first term. Let us suppose 50 countries become involved, with an average of 100 youths each at the end of the first four years.

The contribution of a group of youths this size to the affairs of each country concerned will be negligible. Generally speaking, there is not sufficient expertise in the potential

volunteers for the National Peace Corps to be *advisors* or *organizers*. They must be limited to performing those functions that have an "ordinary" rather than a "catalytic" effect. These youths generally will not have professional or technical experience to make a contribution on a national scale if their numbers are small. One hundred "workers" or teachers in countries with many millions of people cannot contribute enough to make a real "difference" in the history of the country.

The third major difficulty is that a program starting at the 1,000–2,000 youth level and growing to 5,000 will be an inadequate response to the following motivations:

- 1) American youth wants to serve abroad;
- 2) psychological impact abroad;
- 3) impact on American society;
- 4) political aspects.

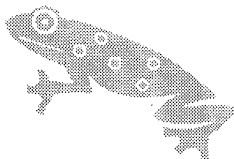
From these points of view, even at a 5,000-man level only one youth in every 600 (?) who becomes 21 years of age would be able to serve in the Peace Corps — or from another, more restricted point of view, if all the youths were drawn from our colleges and universities, on the basis of present enrollments only one youth in every 100 graduates would be able to serve. (Obviously, with the potential doubling of the college and university population in the next 10 years the figure would be about one in 200.) With regard to psychological impact abroad, a total of 5,000 youths and 50 countries (an average of 100 youths per country) is believed to be an insufficient number to produce a psychological impact of great enough importance to be a major justification for the National Peace Corps.

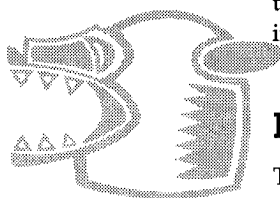
From a political viewpoint, given the response by American youth that this paper assumes, a National Peace Corps that allows an average of only two or three youths to enter each year from each college and university (not to mention the myriad number of other eligible youth) may well produce a *negative* political impact. An anticipated bold "new frontier" may fall into disrespect rather rapidly.

These three major difficulties are believed to be of such magnitude that they cast serious doubt on the wisdom of proceeding to implement the National Peace Corps on the limited scale now generally envisioned.

F.Y.I.

Peace Corps
Volunteers have
served in 131
countries since 1961.





It is possible that with extremely good fortune the program would be "satisfactory"; that is, it would avoid major trouble, but its relative cost would be high and its true value to the underdeveloped areas, insignificant.

IV. PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to advocate consideration of a "*quantum* jump" in the thinking and programming concerning the National Peace Corps. Its postulate is that America ought to consider initiating the program with several thousand Americans participating in the first 12 to 18 months — say, 5,000 to 10,000. The ultimate level of manpower to be utilized in this program will of course depend upon its initial success and difficulties. However, the potential of this program is great and it may prove to be the case that it should be at the 30,000, the 50,000 or possibly even at the 100,000 level. Even this latter higher level would mean that only one out of every 30 (?) youths would serve in the Peace Corps.

Since it is somewhat difficult to illustrate abstractly the general thesis of the nature and value of a National Peace Corps involving a great many thousands of Americans, this paper proposes the following illustrative 5,000-youth, one-country program for examination. Following the examination of this program, some generalities will be suggested about the possibility of, and the advantages and disadvantages of, a National Peace Corps of large dimension.

V. A 5,000-MAN, ONE-COUNTRY PROGRAM

[SECTION V: A 5,000-MAN, ONE-COUNTRY PROGRAM, which details a proposed Peace Corps Philippines project, has been omitted because of space limitations. Write *RPCV Writers & Readers* for a complete copy of "A Towering Task."]

VI. CONCLUSION — RELEVANCE OF PHILIPPINE PEACE CORPS PROGRAM TO WORLDWIDE NATIONAL PEACE CORPS

It is believed that the National Peace Corps English Teaching Program in the Philippines herein proposed supports the postulate of this paper that America ought to consider a Peace Corps of large magnitude. If, for example, up to a million American youths were to serve abroad in the next decade, the contribution to the free world — and to America — might be enormously important. This suggestion is, of course, highly assertive and this paper cannot attempt to demonstrate its validity.

However, following the same kind of argument for the teaching of the English language in the Philippines, it certainly would be fruitful to explore a 5,000 to 10,000-man-per-year project in English language instruction in Nigeria. In India, if the program were acceptable and worthwhile from the Indian point of view, it is not *impossible* to imagine a 50,000 Peace Corps teacher force in India. And — at this level — the Peace Corps might become a tremendous asset in Indian planning. Pakistan likewise offers a vast potential. In Mexico there is certainly the possibility of using a few thousand Peace Corps English teachers. Thus, in one field — English language teaching — it is here postulated that very large numbers of Peace Corps teachers could be most usefully employed.

Such a national effort on the part of the United States can not be undertaken easily or without a great deal of thought and preparation. This paper does not advocate that there is a clear conclusion that we ought to have a large National Peace Corps. What it does advocate is that a National Peace Corps starting on a small scale and growing, say, to the 5,000 level on a worldwide basis, is a marginal undertaking and may, on balance, cause more trouble than it is worth. Because this paper postulates that there is a large and fundamental motivation behind the Peace Corps idea of national and international importance, it advocates making a real assessment of the relative value and cost of starting large and accelerating to the extent that the program's contribution is commensurate with its cost.

F.Y.I.

147,000 Americans have joined the Peace Corps over the past 35 years.

VII. RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Based upon the above discussion of the National Peace Corps, other reports and analyses, speeches and articles which have appeared to date, it is believed that certain preliminary decisions with respect to the Peace Corps and an interim administrative organization need to be taken. This section proposes an approach to such interim action.

The Executive Branch should decide that the Peace Corps will be launched in calendar year 1961 and at a level sufficiently large to: 1) Assure maximum chance of success; 2) demonstrate that *major* activities can be undertaken in particular countries; and 3) test the wisdom of a variety of types of approaches and activities. Thus, it is believed that in February President Kennedy should decide that, even in advance of legislation and formal administrative structure, the Peace Corps will be launched with a major Presidential statement or speech, that a call for volunteers will be thus issued, that preparatory work for a series of specific pilot projects will begin, that screening of applicants will be under way, that to the extent necessary appropriate contracts will be negotiated and that selected foreign governments will be contacted.

To accomplish this, a variety of alternative administrative structures are feasible. However, none appears to be as efficient, desirable or as quick as utilizing the existing overseas agency which handles the bulk of U.S. overseas activities and personnel — the International Cooperation Administration. It is recommended that a new Deputy Director be appointed immediately in ICA [Wiggins was then Deputy Director at ICA] to serve as the Peace Corps Administrator. This Deputy Director, his staff and activities would be funded by a Presidential Determination, utilizing Mutual Security funds through the exemption route (Section/of the Mutual Security Act). He would be given an immediate authorization for an administrative and program staff in Washington, D.C. of up to 150 people to initiate the activity. This group would be recruited on a priority basis over the months ahead. This group would be a

somewhat separate organizational unit within the ICA and it would draw on the services and skills of the rest of the agency but would have full organizational responsibility for the administration of the program (as indicated, this would of course be an interim arrangement pending an overall reorganization of foreign economic activities).

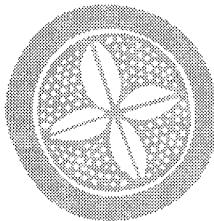
It is assumed that such a Deputy Director would be a man of national stature in whom President Kennedy, Secretary Rusk, Under Secretary Ball and Mr. Labouisse would have full confidence.

The Administrator of the National Peace Corps would be charged with the development of an immediate program which would look toward the utilization of, say, 5,000 to 10,000 youths in the next 12 to 18 months. Certain major projects should be undertaken, such as the Philippines proposal contained in this paper, which would utilize 1,000 youths the first year. Probably a parallel English teaching program for Nigeria ought to be instituted immediately, involving another thousand teachers. The National Peace Corps could also be effectively used in health programs such as malaria eradication and smallpox vaccination, particularly in Africa. The existing voluntary agency programs for youths abroad should be expanded as rapidly as possible to absorb up to an additional thousand youths in the next 18 months. Maximum utilization should be made of National Peace Corps personnel in the regular "Point IV" activities of ICA abroad in some 60 countries, which could probably make use of 1,000 youths in the next 18 months. Likewise, Peace Corps personnel could be attached to the 40 university contracts abroad, adding, for example, another 300 to 400 to the total.

These and the host of other activities that have been suggested should be carefully screened and selected projects initiated. The actual final number to be enrolled in the Peace Corps in the first 12 to 18 months should of course depend upon the volume of good programs that can be developed and successfully administered. ☉

F.Y.I.

On September 1, 1961
the first group of Peace
Corps Volunteers
arrived in Ghana.



An interview by John Coyne (Ethiopia 1962–64)

The Midnight Ride of Warren Wiggins

THE DAY AFTER THE 1961 INAUGURATION, President John F. Kennedy telephoned Sargent Shriver and asked him to form a presidential Task Force “to report how the Peace Corps should be organized and then to organize it.” Immediately after receiving that call from Kennedy, Shriver called Harris Wofford.

At the time, Shriver was 44; Wofford was 34. They had become good friends during the presidential campaign. Wofford had worked as Kennedy’s adviser on civil rights, and together they had worked on the talent hunt for the new administration.

Initially, the Task Force consisted solely of Shriver and Wofford, sitting in a suite they had rented at the Mayflower Hotel in

Washington. Most of their time was spent making calls to personal friends they thought might be helpful. One name led to another: Gordon Boyce, president of the Experiment in International Living; Albert Sims of the Institute of International Education; Adam Yarmolinsky, a foundation executive; Father Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame; George Carter, a campaign worker who focused on civil rights issues and a former member of the American Society for African Culture; Louis Martin, a newspaper editor; and Franklin Williams, an organizer of the campaign for black voter registration, and a student of Africa.

Shriver had scheduled the first official meeting of his Task Force for February 6. Despite the recommendations, opinions and reports, Shriver and Wofford had made relatively little headway



Warren Wiggins with President Kennedy

in defining the new program in terms of specific size, costs, organization, and objectives. When Kennedy requested a report by the end of February, Shriver had to concede that, as of yet, he had not even settled on an official name for the new agency. While it was less than two weeks since the President had assigned him the task, "Kennedy wanted to know what was taking us so long," says Shriver.

Kennedy had given Shriver a report written by Max Millikan, director of the Center

for International Studies at MIT, that stated that the development of such an agency should be slow, placing several hundred people in the first year or two. Millikan's modest proposal was also modestly named: The International Youth Service Agency. He recommended a pilot operation as a carefully supervised part of the overall U.S. aid program. Millikan would have young Americans living on college campuses in host countries, venturing out into the community to "do good" and return to the college dormitories every night. The President-elect appeared to have accepted this programming. A press release on January 9, 1961 from Kennedy's office about the "Peace Corps idea" used the name International Youth Service Agency and said in part, "Because of the experimental nature of the program, and the limited information now available about needs, it should certainly be started on a small scale . . ."

This was totally contrary to Shriver's intuition. Shriver said, "we knew the Peace Corps would have only one chance to work. As with the parachute jumper, the chute had to open the first time." It had to be new in size and thrust.

UNKNOWN TO SHRIVER AND WOFFORD, at the same time they were busily organizing the Task Force, two officials in the Far Eastern division of International Cooperation Administration (ICA) were also working on a Peace Corps plan. Warren Wiggins was the deputy director of Far Eastern operations at



Warren Wiggins, 1966

ICA. He was still in his 30s but had already helped administer the Marshall Plan in Western Europe. He was totally dissatisfied with the manner in which American overseas programs were run — he called them “golden ghettos.” Working with Wiggins was Bill Josephson, just 26, who was a lawyer at ICA.

The two started with a program that would be limited to sending young Americans overseas to teach English. But as they wrote, their vision broadened.

They called their paper “A Towering Task”— taking the title from the phrase Kennedy had used in his State of the Union address: “The problems . . . are towering and unprecedented — and the response must be towering and unprecedented as well.”

Wiggins and Josephson sent a copy of the paper to Wofford, another to Richard Goodwin at the White House, and a third to



Bill Josephson, 1960s

Shriver. As Wiggins said, “We wanted to make sure Shriver would get it.”

It has been said that Shriver read “A Towering Task” late on Sunday, February 5th and thought that it was brilliant. According to Shriver, he immediately sent a telegram to Wiggins inviting him to attend the the first Task Force meeting the next morning. Thus the so-called “mid-

Rowland Scherman

night ride of Warren Wiggins" became an early legend in the Peace Corps.

Meanwhile, Wofford had read the Wiggins proposal as well and he called Shriver enthusiastically at 7 a.m. that Monday morning, but Shriver told him he was too late — Wiggins had already been invited to the Task Force meeting.

Shriver introduced Wiggins and Josephson at the February 6th meeting and distributed copies of "A Towering Task."

IT WAS A PREGNANT MOMENT. From this point on, Wiggins and Josephson became the engine room of the Peace Corps. Shriver describes Wiggins as "the figure most responsible" for the planning and organization that brought the Peace Corps into being.

Wiggins had, with his paper, given Shriver the song Shriver wanted to sing. Intuitively, Shriver knew he had to start big to make the Peace Corps work and here was the Deputy Director of the Far Eastern Division of the International Cooperation Administration telling him that big was better and that the Peace Corps need not be a small experimental project.

Recently we spoke to Warren Wiggins about his recollection of "A Towering Task" and his early days in the Peace Corps.

How did you come to write "A Towering Task"?

W.W. Bill Josephson and I were working in the U.S. Foreign Aid Program (now AID) and were really disappointed with Eisenhower's stolidity and lack of imagination in the way he ran the country. With Kennedy's election we decided we just had to be members of this new and exciting administration. Shortcutting a long story, we wrote a series of papers on how best to run foreign aid. We sent those to the Kennedy staff via a fellow named George Springstein who was on George Ball's personal staff, and nothing happened. Finally Springstein said that the incoming administration didn't want to listen to anybody on the inside. That was a terrible insult to us.

So Josephson and I huddled. Well, if they didn't want to listen to us, we thought, we'd have to write about what they wanted to hear about. We picked the Peace Corps. We were going to use this paper as our way to connect with the new administration. And so we started writing "A Towering Task."

What did you try to achieve with the paper? What were its driving ideas?

W.W. One of the things that was important in the paper, as well as in the first days of launching the agency, was simplicity. For example, Josephson and I said we would never support Volunteers doing anything except teaching English. That is a cardinal example of the drive to make the agency simple, workable, understandable, and within the competence of young Americans.

After we got into it, we did a lot of things in the Peace Corps other than teaching English, but in the beginning that was an explicit, verbalized statement of what the Peace Corps would be.

The second thing is that we were anti-professional. We were anti-bureaucratic. We were anti-establishment. I don't know from whence some of that came, other than that I always prided myself on being a maverick, outspoken, audacious, irreverent.

Shriver's staff was also anti-bureaucratic. They were a wide assortment of people who, with a few exceptions, had no professional skills in volunteering and no experience internationally.

We were amateurs. All the Charlie Peters, the Bill Haddads, the Woffords. We were a whole group of people who were amateurs in the business of being a government agency that ran volunteers.

We paid no attention to the hierarchies of professionalism. For example, we wanted to teach English as a second language. We called in the national association of teaching English as a secondary language and said we needed training programs. They were all excited by this and said we needed to train for two years.

We told them we didn't have two years. They finally cut it back to 18 months and said they couldn't be responsible unless the Volunteers had 18 months of training. We said four months is the max, and we're going to teach a lot besides teaching English as a second language. They left and we never paid attention to them again.

We wrote our own books. We taught our own courses. We were ahead of the game, and we did not rely on the professionals. Although we had two former heads of the American Psychological Association heading up selection, the selection process was anti-establishment. It didn't run like normal selection processes.

We considered the Department of State the enemy. We plotted to see that State never got its grips on us. We did not want to establish the Peace Corps as an establishment. I was so proud that for a couple of years we never had policy directives. We only had interim policy directives. And that was lovely.

We swore we would never have a personnel officer in the Peace Corps, and we succeeded for a little while. Then we finally appointed somebody, but she had no power.

So being anti-establishment, amateurish, anti-professional was a big thing in the success of the Peace Corps, and in the building, if you will, of an institution.

We were also value driven. We put values very high in every decision and anybody who couldn't shape up left.

We stripped away all of the cultural and environmental support that a Volunteer had grown up with: family, school, peer group, etc. All of that was stripped away and the person was then transplanted overseas with poverty as a value.

We also took a very long-term view about things, which is in contrast to what's done today. I think the best evidence of that was in the public service ads. My favorite is two pictures of Chimbote, Peru, in the same ad — Chimbote before the Peace Corps, Chimbote afterwards. You can't tell the difference. What a marvelous ad.

We wanted the Volunteers to live the life of the villager, wear the same kind of clothes, eat the same kind of food, live in the same kind of house, or shack, or whatever. In a religious sense, we were taking a vow of poverty. We didn't put it that way; we said we would live the life of the people. But that, to an American, *is* a vow of poverty. We raised that to an ideal, as a vow of poverty is raised to the ideal. And that turned out to be an enormous strength for the Peace Corps.

We stripped away all of the cultural and environmental support that a Volunteer had grown up with: family, school, peer group, etc. All of that was stripped away and the person was then transplanted overseas with poverty as a value. The Volunteer went alone. He or she had some buddies, but they were out there in a strange land, without

the normal supports and material blessings that had accompanied them all their lives, and that produced introspective changes.



Sargent Shriver, 1960s

I don't like these words, but that produced a self-assessment. What am I, anyway, if I am now living the life of a strange culture and without my normal supports? It forces Volunteers to think about who they are and what they represent and what their ideals are. I think that the twin things of accepting a non-materialistic life and losing all the normal supports produces people who when they come back know a heck of a lot more about themselves because they've had to leave a large part of their prior identity behind for two years and concentrate on living the poor life. We didn't put it that way in the Peace Corps, not in the first days, but it changed many Volunteers.

The legend of the "Midnight Ride of Warren Wiggins" says that Shriver read "A Towering Task" late one night and sent you a telegram . . .

W.W. Well . . . How can I say it? . . . I never received a telegram. Bill and I wrote the paper and I produced a series of copies that I sent around to the administration, hoping one would reach Shriver, who was the designated point man on the Peace Corps. I also heard — this would be in January — that there was going to be a meeting at the Mayflower Hotel and I wanted to be at that meeting. I think I called up somebody, but I don't remember; anyway I got myself invited by saying something like: I'm the Deputy Director of the Far East at ICA.

And no telegram?

W.W. As I said: What I know for sure is I never received the famed telegram. But Shriver had obviously read the paper, because he started the meeting by saying, "I don't know Warren Wiggins, but he has written this paper. . ."

What did you think, sitting there in the Mayflower Hotel room, watching all these men reading your paper ?

W.W. My heart was pounding. I thought then that I had made my connection with the new administration. That was what I wanted. I had hooked myself into the administration with that sentence by Shriver, and that is what I wanted.

But your paper became the first draft defining the Peace Corps?

W.W. Yeah.

What continues to surprise me is how few people, since that morning in the Mayflower, have read "A Towering Task." It is the bible for the Peace Corps, but no one has read it.

W.W. It's marvelous that nobody has read it because, you see, in most ways I didn't know what the heck I was talking about. In some ways I was dead on, but I did recommend that we ship air-conditioned trailers to the Philippines to house the Volunteers. It's a far cry from the theology of the Peace Corps that evolved, but then, those were the early days.

What's your recollection of how long that meeting at the Mayflower lasted?

W.W. An hour and a half, two hours.

And what then? Were you detailed?

W.W. Sarge bought my soul that Mayflower morning and I just continued to work for him. He was working out of the hotel and I said, "Why don't you move into some ICA offices." He said, "What do you mean." I said, "Well, I can get you space." So he said fine and we got our offices in the Maiatico Building, up on the 6th floor.



Franklin Williams, 1960s

This would have been 1961?

W.W. Something like that. I went to Jack and said I had to get out, that I couldn't work with Shriver. I don't think I've ever told anyone this before. Bell said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Shriver won't see me. He won't pay any attention to me. It's just not workable. Get me back to ICA."

Jack Bell looked me in the eye and said, "No, permission is not granted. You go back there and you work it out." He said, "The Peace Corps is important and you're important to the Peace Corps and I will not listen to this, and I will not go to Dillon and get you out of the Peace Corps."

I went back to the Peace Corps and went out to lunch with Franklin Williams. I was a drinking man then — not now — and we had a three- martini lunch and in severe frustration I broke down with Franklin. I didn't know him that well, but I liked him.

I told him the story and Franklin said, "Warren, you've got to learn how to handle Sarge." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, think about this. You've been abroad, you've served overseas. You know about these things. You march into Sarge's office and you just shoot off your mouth about what ought to be done and Sarge is sitting there and he doesn't know what to do with you. What you need to do is relax Sarge. Give him time, give him options. You don't understand Sarge at all." Franklin told me to write notes to Sarge and stop trying to see him. "Send him little missives," Franklin said. "And then Sarge can talk to Eunice, call Haddad, call anyone. Don't force him to react when you're in front of him and charged up and you know all this and you're telling him what to do. Don't ask for an appointment again. Just send him notes."

It sounded like good advice so I stopped asking for appointments and I started giving him notes written in longhand. They came back the next morning, or whenever, with an answer. It worked beautifully. After a month we began to see each other, although I still sent him notes on anything that was delicate or important or involved my trying to tell him how we ought to do things. So I'm very glad that Jack Bell refused to get me out of the Peace Corps.



Harris Wofford, 1960s

Harris Wofford?

W.W. He was very helpful. He was very important to Shriver. The most important thing Wofford brought was his influence, as a sounding board, an initiator and a friend of Shriver. He was an enormous help to me personally. He sat me down once and said, "Warren, you've got to learn how to say 'Father Ted'." Theodore Hesburgh, the president of Notre Dame, was called 'Father Ted' by everyone and he was important to Shriver, important to the Peace Corps, and we were training our first Volunteers for Chile at his university. Harris said to me, "We're going to practice now." This is an absolutely true story. Wofford said, "Father Ted" and I said, "Father Ted." "Say it again," said Wofford, "say it again." And this was repeated and repeated until it became natural.

Why couldn't you say "Father Ted"?

W.W. I guess being a Unitarian I was uncomfortable speaking so informally to a priest. I don't know. Maybe because I never had dealt with a Catholic priest in my life. I don't know the answer. I was a person of limited experience and here I was going out to Notre Dame to negotiate with Hesburgh (excuse me, Father Ted). Wofford walked me through an education process, and I'm indebted to the man.

Bill Josephson?

W.W. Josephson was in some ways much closer to Shriver than I was. Josephson was an incisive critic. He worked like a son of a bitch, ground out the stuff that had to be done, understood the legal stuff. He was very important in the producing of that first report to the President and the writing of the Executive Order that created the Peace Corps. He played a key role across the board in that first period and then in the administration of the Peace Corps. To put it politely, he was less than friendly toward everyone when it came to keeping the Peace Corps on the straight and narrow.



Frank Mankiewicz, 1960s

Frank Mankiewicz?

W.W. Frank, given all I've said about volunteerism and amateurism and anti-professionalism and all of that, he was willing to drop Volunteers by parachute, and he did it and made it go. He talked the success of it, and denounced the critics and always dealt with Shriver and he'd always end-run me; he always pissed me off. He had a relationship with Shriver and I'd wake up having been had, just out of the loop. But I had enough loop to survive. He and I tended to disagree on almost everything, but I have a high admiration for this wonderful man.



Jack Hood Vaughn, 1960s

Jack Hood Vaughn?

W.W. I worked more with Vaughn than any other person in my life, four separate long-term assignments, back to back. Mostly I have co-workers; Vaughn was a friend. Vaughn and I traveled at length in Bolivia together, the two of us, when we were both in the ICA mission to Bolivia. He's got a lot of Teddy Roosevelt in him. He was a former prizefighter. On the other hand, he's cautious, conservative and sometimes not terribly involved in some of the broader sweep of things. Vaughn stands up and is counted and is determined. He is a good administrator. He is an excellent person. He is my friend.



Charlie Peters, 1960s

We also asked . . .

Should the Peace Corps be reinvented?

The question for the country ought not to be: How do we reinvent the Peace Corps as the Peace Corps. The interest of the country ought to be: How do we apply Peace Corps principles to other things that are aching in need of attention?

Charlie Peters?

W.W. Charlie has one of those insightful, appreciative, wonderful minds. We didn't have many exceptional minds in the Peace Corps, but Charlie's really is exceptional, and what he did with the evaluation function was what needed to be done and it was first rate.

Some final questions. Should the Peace Corps be reinvented?

W.W. The question for the country ought not to be: How do we reinvent the Peace Corps as the Peace Corps. The interest of the country ought to be: How do we apply Peace Corps principles to other things that are aching in need of attention? That is the Peace Corps opportunity: to see itself — and to be seen by

others — as containing very dramatic statements about how to get things done, and how to involve people in doing what needs to be done.

I recently have begun to call myself the only living American who worked in both the Marshall Plan and the Peace Corps. I keep thinking about how that might be phrased on my tombstone.

Now the Marshall Plan, like the Peace Corps, was shot full of amateurism. Most of us were amateurs who had never been abroad, never been in the Foreign Service, didn't know a damn thing about the transfer of money, yet we created the all-time best post-World War II success story. And the characteristics of the Marshall Plan were a lot like those of the Peace Corps. In the last 50 years we have had two outstanding maverick institutions of the federal government funded with 100 percent federal government money and both were huge successes. America needs to ask, "Well, what gives?"

Why did we have a Peace Corps?

W.W. We caught the tenor of the times. Or maybe the tenor of the times caught us. The Peace Corps epitomized the New Frontier, Kennedy, and the mood of the country following the Eisenhower years. The Peace Corps caught the wind that was blowing in the land.

If you want to be effective now you have to damn well know what winds are blowing. You can't just come up with good ideas or good organizations or a group of good people. You've got to understand the country and the winds that are blowing in the country. If you want to run a little revolution, you can't do it just because you are bright or able or dedicated or grouped together, or did things in the past.

If we didn't have a Peace Corps, could we start one today?

W.W. I think the answer is that society would not. We only have a Peace Corps now because it is there. ☺

In retrospect

This past fall, *RPCV Writers & Readers* asked dozens of people who worked with Warren Wiggins, or were Peace Corps Volunteers, to read or reread "A Towering Task" and give their opinions of the document, thirty-five years after the "Midnight Ride of Warren Wiggins." The following are the comments we received.

A passion for risk

Reading "A Towering Task," one is struck by its *Americanness*: cautious idealism, regard for pitfalls, practical worrying about numbers and logistics, finally the passion for risk and boldness. (I remember writing those 104s [new program requests from the field], insisting that each new program would lead to national transformation, and including details re. sufficient latrines.)



Bob Blackburn, 1968

Carol Kim Reika

The paper also reminded me of attending the NAACP Youth Convention in Washington, D.C. in the spring of 1954. The previous fall, our elders at their convention had adopted the slogan 'Free By 1963!' Our reaction: Wait, hell. Why not desegregate and integrate everything in sight by, say, September?

Warren never got his 50,000 Volunteers, and racial justice is still a dream. But progress has been made, and who's to say we've not all been transformed by the struggle?

Bob Blackburn

Deputy Director — Somalia 1964-66

Charm and energy vs. ho-hum

Wiggins' paper is new to me. Reading it for the first time, 35 years after it was written, I'm impressed by his prophetic insights. I like his boldness. He was right in predicting that Peace Corps would benefit America and Americans the most. He identified English teaching as the Peace Corps job most in demand and the easiest to fill. He did overestimate the PCV numbers — unfortunately we never got into the 30,000 to 100,000 range he suggested.

I can't gauge the paper's impact. When and how much was Shriver influenced by it? Surely Shriver would be sympathetic to the bold strategy. But how many others were urging Shriver to adopt a similar approach, or a different tack?

Regardless of the virtues or the singularity of the ideas in Wiggins' paper, it takes people to convert the ideas into reality. Who other than Shriver so successfully built and marketed the Peace Corps? It was Shriver who had the Kennedy aura and stature, to which he added his own considerable charm, energy and persuasive powers. He recruited and energized a remarkable staff. He won more than ample support overseas and in the U.S.

Put Wiggins' paper in the hands of a ho-hum Peace Corps Director in 1961. Would the tiny Peace Corps agency ever have achieved such astonishing public approval? Given its dramatic popularity from the start, how unfortunate it is that today so many Americans are surprised to hear that there still is a Peace Corps. It's unfortunate that the Peace Corps has become what Arnold Zeitlin describes (in the March issue of *RPCV Writers & Readers*) as a "token" and a "small potatoes agency." Maybe the Peace Corps has become in 1996 what Wiggins in his 1961 paper said it should shun being: "safe" and "cautious."

David Elliott

Deputy Director — Sierra Leone 1964–65

Deputy Director — Nigeria 1965

Director — Nigeria 1965–66

Director — India 1966–68

PCV — Poland 1991–93

Pure ICA style

I'm not going to have anything to say about Warren's paper. I read it last night for the first time. It was a weird experience. It has been many years since I've perused a document so unmistakably assembled amid the late-night bustle of an excited government office. And typed on a typewriter! Imagine the drafts, the corrections, the insertions Warren and his able secretary went through as the time for the fateful presentation approached.

I suppose the value of the document was its pure ICA style — a voice from inside the foreign policy gates saying "go for it" in a painfully turgid manner.

Warren was right, of course. A small, experimental effort would have done no good — but no one had to tell the President, or Sarge, or Bill Haddad that.

I'm afraid I don't see how you're going to make much of the paper. It may have been significant at the time in the context of the debate over "big or small" (if, indeed, it was really being debated). In any case I didn't arrive in Washington until the question was settled and the clear effort was to send out as many Volunteers as possible, to as many countries as possible as fast as we could.

What the document did was to place Warren Wiggins in a position that was very good for him and very good for the Peace Corps. He was an excellent program manager, a true believer and a square shooter.

I have heard he may be writing a novel. I read "A Towering Task" and weep.

Dick Elwell

Evaluator — PC/W 1962–66

The seminal document

Four policy decisions determined the ultimate success of the Peace Corps:

1. To pay Peace Corps Volunteers no more than their host-country counterparts;
2. To reward Volunteers at the completion of service with no more than a modest relocation allowance and the thanks of their country;
3. To kick off the Peace Corps with a bang — big programs in Ethiopia, India and the Philippines.

4. To keep Peace Corps out of State and ICA, AID's predecessor.

The genius of Warren Wiggins was to recognize that anything less than a big push would fail to grab the attention of the public and that a small Peace Corps smothered inside a large bureaucracy would die stillborn. "A Towering Task" is therefore the seminal document of the Peace Corps, chapter one, verse one, Genesis: "In the beginning, Wiggins said . . ."

Dick Irish

PCV — Philippines 1962–64

Staff — PC/W 1964–66



Padraic Kennedy, 1960s

Bold words

"A Towering Task." Even the words were bold. They reflected that rugged optimism pervading President Kennedy's administration, and the ambitious mission of the Peace Corps. In "A Towering Task," Warren Wiggins urged that the Peace Corps burst onto the international scene 10,000 strong and envisioned a Peace Corps eventually growing to 150,000 Volunteers. His paper clearly raised the sights of the possible. The very idea of the Peace Corps captured the conscience and imagination of the country. The combination of President Kennedy's call to service, the energy and inspiration of Sargent Shriver's leadership and the limitless potential outlined in Wiggins' "A Towering Task" was electric. None of us in those early days doubted the Peace Corps would succeed. None of us doubted that Americans were up to the challenge.

Padraic Kennedy

Director of Volunteer Support — PC/W 1961–64

A good idea

Except for the big numbers Wiggins asked for, it's remarkable how much the actual Peace Corps resembled — and still resembles — his proposal. It turned out to have been a good idea.

The numbers-game debates of the '60s are moot now, in the age of *Puny is Beautiful*, but it's still unnerving to recall plans for 10,000 or 50,000 Volunteers per country. The intent was to "change history," but with no idea of *how* that might happen. Wiggins doesn't seem to have considered the law of unintended consequences.



Richard Lipez

The Peace Corps probably is more sophisticated now about messing around in traditional cultures. And anyway other forces far cruder than mere PCVs are wrenching old societies into the modern age.

But the best lesson for the Peace Corps of the year 2000, big or small, comes as an afterthought in Wiggins' memo: "The actual final number to be enrolled . . . should of course depend upon the volume of good programs that can be developed and successfully administered." That's still what will work for host countries and for Volunteers: programming, programming, programming.

Richard Lipez

PCV — Ethiopia 1962–64

Evaluator — PC/W 1964–67

At odds with quantum leaps

Thank you for sending on a copy of "A Towering Task." I'm not sure that I ever read it during my days at the Peace Corps but I was, of course, very familiar with all the rhetoric about towering tasks and quantum leaps.

During those days, I was among those always at odds with the advocates of quantum leaps and big numbers. I have to smile at reading Warren's fanciful vision of 50,000 Volunteers in India. The program there in the mid-1960s — when Dick Lipez and I evaluated it — was unwieldy at around 2,000. Yet, despite old misgivings, it was refreshing to read Warren's old arguments, for they are so wonderful and bold. He was perfectly right, of course, in stressing that the Peace Corps had to be large enough to make an impact. Although I think the Peace Corps envisioned by him would have been overblown, his arguments demolished the foolish notion that tiny groups of Volunteers should go out either as experimental guinea pigs or as apprentices of ICA workers. A Peace Corps without impact would not have lasted very long.

The 60s were a wonderful time to work in the Peace Corps. If you successfully batted down a bold proposal from idea-churners like Warren and Harris Wofford, you always knew that they would confidently come back with more until one made sense. Does that still go on in Washington? It does not seem to.

Stan Meisler

Evaluator — PC/W 1964-66

"Make that a large one."

When Sargent Shriver and a handful of people in the Mayflower Hotel were mulling over how to start a Peace Corps, legend has it that Warren Wiggins' "A Towering Task" came in over the transom. Anyone who knows Shriver is aware that convincing him to start BIG wasn't the hardest sell Wiggins would ever have to make. Indeed, if Wiggins hadn't come through with "A Towering Task," Shriver doubtless would have sent out for it through room service.



Donovan McClure, 1960s

Until Peace Corps actually had Volunteers in the field and Margery Michelmores wrote her postcard, we in the information office had little to feed the media other than the grandiose scheme of "A Towering Task." It was the inspiration for Bob Gale's campus recruiting blitzes that in 1965, when I was Associate Director of Public Affairs, put 15,000-plus Volunteers in the field — a record that stands today.

Thanks for enclosing "A Towering Task" in your letter. I'll confess I still haven't read it.

Donovan McClure

Public Information — PC/W 1961

Country Director — Sierra Leone 1962-64

Associate Director for Public Affairs — PC/W 1965-66

Country Director — Turkey 1966-68

A few buckets, a few umbrellas

A character in an upcoming novel of mine is on a night flight over the Caribbean, feeling morose:

"He looked out at the clouds, moon over thunder, serenity roofing colossal force. Beneath were millions of the powerless, drowning, battered, fried by lightning, deafened in the storms. How could people on those islands keep going? The planet was chaos and hurricanes, and distant watchers like himself could be of no help at all. Meanwhile, those under the downpour set out buckets in their ignorance, mopped up leaks, tried this, did that, and headed off to work with individual umbrellas, thinking it was just another rainy day. Didn't they know it was futile?"

Warren Wiggins wrote "A Towering Task" in the last days of America's cultural hubris, before we doubted ourselves. Accomplishing "needed" changes abroad? Impact on the poor on a national scale? Any comparable notion today would be stifled in its originating forehead. He actually wrote, "If up to a million Americans youths were to serve abroad in the next decade, the contribution to the free world — and to America — might be enormously important." Right, as in Vietnam.

Wiggins' audacious proposal didn't even fly in 1961. Its call for *big, fast, bold* galvanized Sargent Shriver and his team who had been bored by *slow, small cautious*, but their numbers were scaled way back and the Peace Corps went first to Africa and then to several countries besides the Philippines. Still, the Peace Corps nevertheless accomplished what he imagined it might: changes overseas, real contributions, lots of people teaching and learning. A few buckets, a few umbrellas, a lot of people setting off to work. And it wouldn't have happened without Wiggins' naiveté in *proposing* the thing the way he did. Didn't he know it was futile? Is a lesson in there somewhere?



Joanne Omang

Joanne Omang
PCV — Turkey 1964–66

Involving Americans with the rest of the world

Before there was a Peace Corps, it was difficult to imagine what it might have been, and Warren saw clearly some — but not all — of the possibilities and pitfalls.

He was obviously correct that a large number of relatively small program (less than 100 to 200 PCVs, depending on the size of the host country) could *not* have a major political impact at home or abroad. Indeed, that is exactly what the Peace Corps became — a large number of small programs. As Warren predicted for these circumstances, the Peace Corps is *not* a program of major importance to national leaders in the U.S. or elsewhere.

Could Warren's towering vision of 30,000 to 50,000 PCVs serving simultaneously, with as many as 5,000 in a single country have been achieved? The record casts doubt. The Peace Corps has never been able to recruit or attract such numbers, and tasks more important than the teaching of English would have had to have been devised to appeal to potential Volunteers and to command the attention of political statesmen. For instance, the Peace Corps might have massively affected food production in India in the 1970s or might today flood countries with business management and entrepreneurial skills, as the world turns to privatization and market economies.

The Peace Corps' greatest achievement has probably been the less towering one of exposing so many Americans to the problems and cultures of the people of the less developed countries. A program of 5,000 Volunteers in a single country would have severely jeopardized this result, as Volunteers would have found it difficult to avoid mingling (and partying) with each other.

The fact that, 27 years after leaving the Peace Corps, I am writing this in Alexandria, Egypt — where I am working on my seventh assignment as a volunteer with the International Executive Service Corps — attests to the Peace Corps' success in involving Americans with the rest of the world and especially the less developed countries.

Paul Sack

Country Director — Tanzania 1965-67

Division Director, Program Planning and Budgeting — PC/W 1967-69

Individual success stories

The vision for the Peace Corps that Warren Wiggins wrote in "A Towering Task" is not the Peace Corps we know today.

Thank goodness for that.

The Peace Corps now, as at its inception, is about individual Volunteers helping communities and individuals find their own solutions to their own problems. Wiggins' call for placing 5,000 Volunteers in a single country would be branded today as a "big government" and a "big brother" solution. While increasing the number of Volunteers worldwide certainly would be a good thing, the Peace Corps has never been about "big" anything. The Peace Corps is a government program, but it is not about government solutions.



Donna E. Shalala

A 5000-Volunteer, one-country program, rather than garnering the political, administrative, and financial support that Wiggins believed a smaller program would not, more likely would be viewed as a small invasion. Wiggins felt such a sizable program was called for in order to ensure its success. But he measures Peace Corps' success by its first goal — the transfer of skills. It seems unlikely that such a high concentration of Volunteers would allow for their integration into the host country's society and culture, which is crucial in order to achieve the second and third goals of the Peace Corps — for peoples of other countries to learn about Americans, and for Americans to learn about the peoples and cultures of other countries. These are the goals that we Volunteers learn are far more valuable than the first.

Looking back, we know that a gradual growth approach to the Peace Corps program did not lead to failure, but instead to thousands of individual success stories. Wiggins wanted the Peace Corps to "make a real difference in the history of a country." And while the view of the entering Peace Corps Volunteer is often one of wanting to "save the world," she just as often leaves the Peace Corps knowing that she has touched the lives of the people she has met and worked with, just as they have touched her — and that does make a difference, for both countries.

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Wiggins' vision does still hold lessons for us today about the need for idealism, experimentation, and a willingness to be bold — values that led us to become Volunteers and that gave birth to the Peace Corps. It is the vision of "A Towering Task" that government can and should be a catalyst for positive change. It is a vision carried by everyone who ever served as a Volunteer.

Donna E. Shalala

PCV — Iran 1962-64

Improvisational theater

In the fall of 1961, as the flower children were just beginning to bloom, San Francisco State was selected as a site to train Peace Corps Volunteers destined for Liberia. The arrogance, impudence, naiveté plus enthusiasm that propelled this early training schema *was* the original San Francisco improvisational theater. We knew little about the Third World and less about the process of development, but we were anxious to learn. The Peace Corps was funded to provide service for development in this same Third World that was anxious for assistance.

The Wiggins manifesto was so on target in so many areas and his brilliance and political courage along with so many others in the Peace Corps enclave provided impetus to our rebellious, unafraid-to-run-against-the-grain training staff. With the likes of Sam "S.I." Hayakawa running the language component and Lawrence Ferlinghetti assisting in cross-cultural studies, the Liberia training programs at San Francisco State created exciting, motivated classroom teachers (many who taught without a classroom) who were skilled and sophisticated enough to overcome their training as well as anything they might encounter in West Africa.

Jim Thompson

Contract Overseas Representative — UCLA & Ethiopia 1966-68

Deputy Director — Ghana 1970-72

One good idea deserves another . . .

Continued from page 1

future of the Peace Corps, tentatively scheduled to be held at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania from June 1-4. Gearan is gathering all Peace Corps country directors, senior Peace Corps staff, and interested RPCVs to explore the possibilities.

RPCV Writers & Readers would like to provide Director Gearan with good ideas from our readers. Please send us your

"Good Idea for the Peace Corps." We will publish as many as possible in future issues, and we will forward all of your Good Ideas to Director Gearan.

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