

Peace Corps Grows in Size, Prestige During First Twelve Months

Editor's Note: A year ago this month the Peace Corps launched its program of sending its program to underdeveloped countries. In the 12 months that have passed, the corps has grown both in size and prestige. The following dispatch traces the corps' development and explains how the volunteers are being selected.

By EDWARD COWAN
Washington - (UPI) - This, a remarkable year later, is the Peace Corps.

Road builders in Tanganyika, want-ads for basketball coaches and midwives.

A marriage in Ghana and two tragic deaths in Colombia Margery Michelmore and Mrs. Janie Fletcher. And the ultimate accolade from the Communist world - a denunciation by Nikita Khrushchev.

Volunteers in 16 countries; some 1,100 corpsmen now working or in training. An additional 4,000 going into training this summer.

It was just a year ago this month that the corps, an experiment in grass roots, peo-

ple-to-people assistance, accepted its first volunteers. These were 35 young men who now are on duty in the newly independent African nation of Tanganyika.

In the 12 months that have passed since that milestone, the corps has grown both in size and prestige. Overcoming initial skepticism, it has now reached the point where Khrushchev has denounced it as an "imperialist" organization.

Survives Uproar
The corps' African contingent survived the uproar caused by Margery Michelmore's "lost" postcard. And its Washington contingent avoided getting in a tangle with Congress over the case of Mrs. Janie Fletcher of Pahrump, Nev.

It was Mrs. Fletcher who complained that - as a 65-year-old - she was dropped as a corps recruit because she refused to run a mile before breakfast, swim fully clothed with her feet tied, or cover the full obstacle course.

Throughout the world men and women - some old, some young - have been exposed to primitive living conditions

and awkward environments. Two have died - Lawrence M. Radley, 22, of Chicago, and David L. Crozier, 23, of West Plains, Mo. They were killed in a plane crash in the Colombian mountains while en route back to their assignments in small villages.

First Marriage
There has been the first marriage in the corps' young history - that of Roger Hamilton, a 21-year-old from Arlington, Va., and Carol Armstrong, 24, of Bala-Cynwyd, Pa. Having first met while training for their assignment, they became man and wife in Ghana, where both are teachers.

A list of countries to which the corps is sending volunteers reads like a catalogue of exotic places. Volunteers already are at work in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, Colombia, Chile, St. Lucia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Brazil, El Salvador, Venezuela, Jamaica and Malaya.

Volunteers are soon to be dispatched to Iran, Ecuador, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Ceylon, Tunisia, Somalia, Afghanistan, British Honduras, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Turkey, the Cameroons, and the Ivory Coast.

Since its inception the corps has been run by R. Sargent Shriver, President Kennedy's brother-in-law. In an interview, he said the corps is getting better men and women than he dared hope when he first set to work early in 1961 after Kennedy's inaugural.

By next September, Shriver said, the corps hopes to have 5,000 volunteers in training or on the job overseas. By one year later the total should be about 10,000.

Biggest Problem
According to corps officials, the biggest problem is getting enough volunteers with the right kinds of skills. Needed are 350 combinations of the right skills for the right country. Examples: mechanics and metal workers for Peru; gym teachers for Thailand; a cost accountant for Malaya, and architects for Peru.

The corps' personnel selection specialists must take into account such diverse considerations as when the volunteer will be available, his age, his specific skills, his foreign language ability, the country or continent he prefers, and other projects for which he qualifies.

Now on hand are 10,000 applications. Manual sifting of these would be an endless, uncertain task. To cull the volunteers rapidly and effectively, the corps has turned to modern electronics to help it find someone who might end up working in conditions as primitive as the ages.

To do this, the corps is using a high-speed computer which reads a "language" called Fortran - a computer jargon understood by the whirling computer brain and a few experts who instruct it and study the lines and columns of data it prints.

Racing through thousands of yes-no questions and answers, the computer stacks each application up against the particular combination of skill vs. country that the corps is trying to fill. Each application gets a numerical score for each job.

These scores are printed on a large matrix, a sheet of paper which is about a yard wide. Each vertical column is a job, each horizontal line an applicant.

Reading across, a technician such as petite Gail Switzer can see those jobs for which an applicant is well qualified, those for which his qualifications are so-so, and those for which he won't do at all.

Data Translated
The computer can score the applicants because it has been told some 300 items of information about each. This data has been translated into Fortran for the computer by a group of experts headed by Charles Consolvo, a 23-year-old airman on loan to the Peace Corps from the Air Force.

Consolvo and Miss Switzer work for Dr. E. Lowell Kelly, chief of the corps' selection division. A 56-year-old expert on selection procedures, Kelly is on leave from his post as chairman of the Psychology department at the University of Michigan.

Although proud of the modern, high-speed techniques that his staff uses, Kelly took pains in an interview to emphasize that the final selection is far from a straight mechanical process. As he said, "Who is suitable to be a Peace Corps volunteer is a judgment made by human beings who are professional qualified people."

Kelly keeps a special eye out for applicants with a rural background and farm skills. A boy who knows Spanish and crop rotation would be more valuable to the corps than a triple threat halfback would be to a football team. In Shriver's words, "Everything done in rural America

needs to be done in rural South America."

In searching for people with the skills specified by the countries asking for corpsmen, Kelly and his staff must keep a sharp eye out for other considerations which might disqualify a volunteer regardless of his talents.

A few applications have come from people "trying to get away" - from creditors, a nagging wife or some other personal problem. Automatically rejected are persons lacking U. S. citizenship, those with dependents under 18, and applicants themselves under 18.

The corps is not interested in what it calls "non-functional" characteristics - political affiliation, color, religion and national origin.

Each applicant is required to submit at least six character references. These references are sent a confidential questionnaire which asks about the applicant's job competence, emotional maturity, ability to work with others, special skills and character.

In an introductory message on the questionnaire, Shriver appeals for "a candid expression of opinion" and offers this assurance:

"No candidate will be eliminated on the basis of a single negative rating."

Kelly, as selection director, has found that "people do a surprisingly thorough job."

Applicants usually give the names of people they think will give them a good reference. But one young man, who

was under 21 and needed parental consent, was crossed up by his own father.

The father, who apparently didn't disapprove of his son nearly as much as he did of his joining the Peace Corps, wrote that his boy was a "lazy no good."

It worked.



GETS BADGE - Pvt. Steven D. Miller, 19, son of the late band leader, Glen Miller, has a rifle expert badge pinned on by Sgt. Patrick J. Morocco, his platoon commander, at San Diego, Calif. Miller graduated from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot and will take advanced training at Camp Pendleton. (UPI)

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