

## Peace Corps Training.



**An Attitude and a Direction**



## DETOUR TO BOMBAY

Someday you may be invited to participate in the Peace Corps. If you accept our invitation, you won't take the first plane from Minneapolis to Bombay. For approximately 12 weeks, you will be a "Peace Corps Trainee," which means you will be going through a period of preparation for your work overseas. Your training program could take place at an American university, a Harlem settlement house, an Indian reservation, a converted boys' summer camp, a Turkish village, a site within your country of assignment, or more likely a combination of these places.

The purpose of your training program will be dual. In addition to giving you an idea of what the Peace Corps is like, we want to know more about you. Up to this point, our association has been through your written application, limited correspondence and perhaps a few telephone conversations. You will be observed, tested and possibly interviewed by Peace Corps psychologists and psychiatrists. They will try to decide and help you decide if the Peace Corps is an appropriate way for you to spend two years of your life. In the past, most trainees have viewed the selection process as a tolerance test . . . "If I can live through this, I can certainly bear the stress of overseas service . . ." It is natural for you to have some anxiety about your "selection-in" or "selection-out;" however, training is primarily a learning experience for the trainee and secondarily, a trial period for him.

Much of your time (at least 300 hours) will be spent in language study. You will attend lectures or seminars to discuss the history, politics and culture of your country assignment; you will be instructed in preventive medicine and in some cases, physical fitness. If you are going to teach overseas, several weeks will be spent in practice teaching. If you are selected for a highway

Employing the latest learning techniques and, in some cases, host country experts, the Peace Corps offers instruction in 83 languages and dialects.

construction program, you may spend a few weeks at a Caterpillar Tractor plant. As a community development worker, you may live in a Puerto Rican village, practicing newly learned techniques and language. Leisure hours will probably be filled with singing and folk dances from your new country or bartering in a market place constructed by you and your fellow trainees. Undoubtedly, you will find yourself in heated discussions about the American way of life versus that of your host country.

#### BY TRIAL AND ERROR

Training programs have been the target of more criticism than any other phase of the Peace Corps' operation. Much of this criticism is valid and useful. Training has been too brief; it has often dealt with study which did not apply to the Volunteers' overseas assignment; it has been too regimented and academic — Peace Corps service is not; language instruction has been inadequate for immediate communication; and Volunteers were, in some cases, not psychologically prepared to immerse themselves into the culture of their assignments.

In the beginning, in 1961, these shortcomings were somewhat understandable. We faced the obvious difficulty of attempting to train Vol-

unteers for something which was virtually unknown. We had little idea how to instruct colleges and universities to give practical, non-academic training. Jules Pagano, former Director of the Office of Training, comments on these early trials:

"Four years ago this (training) was a relatively simple process. A small band of hand-picked trainees went to a half-dozen colleges where they embarked upon a rather vague academic program which had been described over the telephone and in Peace Corps brochures in glowing terms. The Volunteers' first experience with what we call culture shock may well have occurred at the training site on opening day. They did push-ups in the morning, had three vitamin-packed meals a day, ran through the selection gamut, were pummelled, punctured, and tested. Presto! We had instant Volunteers who knew a little about their destination, had a lot of guts, and a remarkable spirit, but not much more know-how than when they started."

#### AN EMOTIONALLY-CHARGED ENVIRONMENT

Richard Hopkins, former Director of our Puerto Rican camp points out that some early training programs produced excellent Volunteers despite their inadequacies.

"Ironically, some of the more incompetently-administered Peace Corps training programs have produced the best-

trained Volunteers, precisely because they forced the trainees to cope with ambiguity, to wrestle with an emotionally-charged environment, to assume responsibility for portions of their own training, and to deal with the grand issue of what they were training for anyway. These are experiences more closely related to the true demands of Peace Corps service than the endless lectures and the high degree of inappropriate structure that would have been present had such programs come off well."

As late as 1965, the Peace Corps found that it was repeating if not compounding its errors in training. An Education Task Force made up of energetic and forward-thinking Peace Corps officials and former Volunteers was established to study the problems of training and to recommend ways it might be improved. The following comments are extracted from the Task Force Report:

#### THE IRRELEVANCE OF PEACE CORPS

Progress has been made in making training more practical and pertinent, yet here, as in other areas, the Peace Corps is still far from fulfilling its promise. A recent evaluation of one university's training program was subtitled, "Or the Irrelevance of the Peace Corps."

To describe the training we do not want, the following composite account of



Seminars and open exchange give trainees an opportunity to verbalize their

unsuccessful training programs has been taken from the actual words of the Peace Corps' own evaluation studies. Although it may seem like a caricature, it is not fiction and cannot yet be forgotten. It is a foil against which future programs should stand in contrast.

Three weeks after All State University signed a contract with the Peace Corps, a stream of trainees are met at the local airport by a chartered bus and a bull horn which reminds them not to forget their personal belongings. Two hundred are finally rounded up and assigned alphabetically to dormitories. They are welcomed by All State's Project Director (who doesn't make another appearance for three weeks).

Their day is planned for them from beginning (with mass calisthenics at 7 a.m.) to end. Classes (usually lectures), obeying Parkinson's law, expand to fill all available time.

In "Area Studies," coordinated by an acknowledged expert on a country other than that being studied, there are twelve different lecturers, each of whom repeats much of what the others said.

"World Affairs, Communism, and American Studies," known euphemistically as WACAS, has fourteen guest experts and is generally less stimulating than a game of hopscotch. This portion is "slanted towards a positive view of the United States," says the Project Director. "for we don't want alienated people here."

In Technical Studies (with eleven experts) trainees learn to teach English to beginners although the Peace Corps had programmed the teaching Volunteers for jobs in higher secondary schools. Another portion of the group, trained in community development, is prepared completely in the classroom with the exception of two half-day field trips to the local stockyard and cannery.

Two hundred class hours are spent on the foreign language needed, with the most emphasis upon the language's syntax. No language but English is spoken outside classes or at mealtimes. Conversations with their neighbors overseas will be impossible for most of the Volunteers.



An arduous trekker prepares camp as a part of training's physical fitness and recreation program.

Physical Education is popular with some of the trainees for whom it provides the only escape from All State Hall where they eat, sleep and attend classes. The trainees are talked at and confined to classrooms until they become stupefied with verbal ether.

Visitors from Peace Corps/Washington are in and out, each seeking to add emphasis to a different phase of the program. Returned Volunteers on the All State staff, like the students from the host country who are hired for language drill, are not allowed into most of the classes, for fear they might contradict or inhibit the academic experts.

Selection, having started out with a man sent by Peace Corps/Washington who left trainees in fear of their lives, is carried on by a small nervous, All State-hired Field Assessment Officer with a loud, jumpy patter that increases the general insecurity. The average trainee is interviewed by Ph.D. psychologists — or graduate assistants — four times in the first five weeks. Several trainees, unaware that they were even in difficulty, are "selected out" after three months of training

without knowing in what areas they were supposed to be falling short, and without being told of any process of appeal.

Eventually the group, depleted by 20 per cent, with its original curiosity dampened, and whatever self-reliance, self-discipline and initiative there was somewhat arrested, arrives overseas. There, host country officials give them five more days of lectures.

Finally, the Volunteers leave for their assignments, going in most cases by themselves on buses. Two Volunteers are driven to their posts by the Peace Corps Representative, who leaves them off at the outskirts of the small town where they will teach. They are on their own.

Out of the Task Force and a critical view of all training programs, a number of innovations have developed. Some of these ideas have been in the stage of experimentation for the last year. Others will be implemented gradually and some will re-vamp the entire approach to the preparation of future Volunteers.

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Trainees learn by doing. These "construction experts" are bound for a Latin American community development program.

most of our Volunteers directly from Liberal Arts programs. Because most host countries request a high degree of technical competence, you will have to learn a great deal in a very few weeks to meet their expectations. However, a few of you may already have considerable training and experience in technical areas which would enable you to do further independent study, or as is often the case, assume some of the teaching responsibilities in the training program.

### LANGUAGE TRAINING

At the foundation of the program will be the traditional heavy concentration on language training. Volunteers from around the world have assured us that there is value in establishing a firm language background during training. It is essential to begin your work in the host country with confidence in your ability to communicate; to construct a firm base for continued study of the language throughout overseas service. You will probably find language training with the Peace Corps different from any other language course you may have taken. The approach is a practical one and the emphasis will revolve around situational exercises to increase your fluency in a context relevant to your technical skill. Native speakers may well be brought directly from the host country to teach the classes; social occasions including typical meals may be conducted in the language; you may eventually be asked to explain in your new language attitudes and customs of the United States.

As you become immersed in the culture, language, and social and technical problems of another country you will begin to comprehend your role and your involvement for the next two years.

### IN-COUNTRY TRAINING

The immersion idea carried to its logical extreme results in training pro-

### AN EXPERIENCE IN "IMMERSION"

It is obvious that the closer we come to providing cross-cultural situations similar to those Volunteers face overseas, the better prepared you will be to adjust to your new environment. Therefore, we will attempt to give you some experience in handling situations which will present you with new challenges—which will serve as a testing ground for your own resources. Regardless of the primary task to be performed overseas, training in most cases will provide you with an off-site "field" experience in the "other America," with the aim of giving you a broader understanding of our own society in the midst of technological revolution. Simultaneously, you will be called upon to examine the nature of the

host country, its customs, values and thought patterns. Cross-cultural studies serve as a vehicle for reflection and insight into these experiences, as well as an understanding of the attitudes and behavior of non-Americans. With the help of the staff, you will be asked to focus on the similarities and differences of the respective cultures, adding your own perspective based on the experiences you bring to the program.

### TECHNICAL TRAINING

Disbursed throughout this cultural immersion will be technical instruction to help you become sufficiently competent in the skills necessary to perform your assignment overseas. While the Peace Corps is always in need of a wide variety of skills and experiences, we continue to attract

grams conducted in the country of assignment. During the summer of 1966, approximately 20% of our Latin America trainees had four to six weeks of in-country training usually following some preparation at a university. Eighteen percent of the Africa trainees had similar study. Training within the country of assignment was conducted by citizens of the country, Peace Corps staff there and university personnel who administered the earlier phase of training. Final selection was usually completed prior to overseas departure.

In-country training is successful primarily because it is realistic. The trainee can make a critical evaluation of the country and his reaction to it. His ability to do the job can be observed by the staff in a natural setting. He is "eased into" becoming a Volunteer.

### ROLE OF THE RETURNED VOLUNTEERS

Former Volunteers who have outstanding training capabilities have enriched our programs. As no other group, they bring the flavor, the reality of life overseas to the trainees. Remembering some of their own training, the returned Volunteers tend to establish good rapport with the trainees and to focus the program on what prospective Volunteers really need to know. They are familiar with the problems their proteges will meet and can easily fill the gap between academic and practical training. 500 returned Volunteers worked with training programs this past year. Hopefully, there will be a greater number next year who will serve as members of the training faculty.

### FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

The most important single philosophy in Peace Corps Training is that

within certain broad guidelines, each program is a unique, highly individualized educational experience. As a trainee, you will be included in the decision-making process and encouraged to plan parts of the program. While the assembled staff bears most of the responsibility for deciding what goals must be attained, you will bear much of the responsibility for deciding how these goals can best be achieved. You will have the freedom to evaluate your own programs and the progress of your instructors. In turn, you will become responsible for how you spend your time during the twelve weeks. Thus, each training center becomes a community of learning, for the staff as well as the trainee. The Peace Corps is hopeful that the experience will serve as a commencement of your personal involvement with the challenges of social change.

### A RIVER WIDER THAN THE MISSISSIPPI

Jacob Klein of St. John's College puts it this way in his farewell to Volunteers leaving for India:

"Learning, then beckons to you . . . (as it did) to Huck Finn and to Jim. Just as they were carried on that raft down the Mississippi, you will be traveling, all by yourselves, on a river much larger than the Mississippi through rain, and dense fog, and brilliant sunshine, free, yet hunted, burdened by your work or lack of it, accosted perhaps by all kinds of kings and dukes and even some unknown rattlesnakes."

The Peace Corps will continue to innovate in its training programs, will continue to look to educational institutions and to persons from its own ranks to bring vitality and reality to this important beginning of Volunteerism. It is doubtful that our programs will ever become standardized "package deals." They will vary as the trainees vary and will evolve as we learn more about ourselves, the world, and the needs of Volunteers.



In rare moments, there is time to dream of Persian markets, Latin festivals, Pacific paradises, Senegalese cuisine . . .