



Answering Kennedy's Call: Pioneering the Peace Corps in the Philippines

Parker W. Borg, Maureen J. Carroll, Patricia MacDermot Kasdan, Stephen W. Wells

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Fifty years after President Kennedy signed the 1961 Executive Order creating the Peace Corps, nearly 100 former volunteers who joined the new organization in the first year for service in the Philippines recall why they joined, what they experienced, and how this service in the Philippines affected their lives. In addition a half dozen members of the Peace Corps staff in the Philippines and a similar number of Filipinos have contributed their recollections from the period. The book includes photos of individuals from both the 1960s and more recently as well as maps showing communities of service. The Peace Corps program in the Philippines was the first in Asia. Three factors set it apart from others during the early years of the Peace Corps' existence. First, it was the largest program in the world, absorbing 25 per cent of all volunteers at the beginning. Second, all volunteers in the first years were assigned to be "teacher's aides," a position that was never clearly defined and that the Country Director later admitted was a "non-job." And third, the Philippine program occurred in a nation that only fifteen years earlier had become independent from the US, having been America's single effort at establishing an imperialist colonial empire. This history gave the Philippine program a distinctly different political and social dynamic from what was the case in all of the other early Peace Corps countries. These are the reminiscences of a group of young Americans of varying degrees of idealism who answered President Kennedy's call to do what they could for their country. Assigned each to a separate school in the central part of the country, they lived far from the bright lights of Manila. The stories illustrate varying degrees of integration into the local culture, different ways of coping with the frustrations of their "non-job," and what many learned as they came to terms with themselves living far from familiar comforts on a salary of about \$55 per month. Above all the stories tell of the determination and spirit of these early volunteers in establishing a strong basis for one of the important first Peace Corps programs.

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