

Sargent Shriver and the Making of the Peace Corps

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Individual Exhibit

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I. How I Chose My Topic

I've grown up hearing about my grandfather's adventures as one of the first Peace Corps volunteers. David Burger grew up during World War II and the Korean War. He wanted to make a difference working toward peace, not war. He was inspired by President Kennedy's speech urging youth to devote two years of their lives serving in a foreign country. In 1962, Sargent Shriver, the first Peace Corps director, visited my grandfather in Thailand. This motivated me to learn more about Shriver and his leadership of the organization.

II. How I Conducted My Research

I began researching at the Cofrin Library archives of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. I discovered Sargent Shriver's book, *The Point of the Lance*, which helped me understand his philosophy of the early Peace Corps. I found several books written from the volunteer's perspective. The librarian taught me how to use microfiche and I found a 1963 *Time* magazine cover story about Shriver's Peace Corps.

I had three excellent "living" primary sources. I interviewed my grandfather and my cousin, Megan Wagner, a recent volunteer. I read a memoir by one of my father's fellow volunteers.

My exhibits and research expanded significantly based on the judges' feedback. I created a new board for each level. For Regionals, I added artifacts, quotes, and early criticism. Before State, I met with a historical society representative. Based on her critique and the regional judges' comments, I did more research on-line and found more Peace Corps books at my local library. I researched the 1960's to understand the context of the

Cold War and JFK's New Frontier. I discovered the on-line JFK Presidential Library archives containing Shriver's personal papers from the time period. For Nationals, I doubled my board size and added my grandfather's Thai suitcase to showcase the story about Shriver's visit with volunteers. I expanded on Shriver's biography and added a newsreel introducing the Peace Corps.

III. How I Selected My Presentation Category and Created My Project

I thought an exhibit would be the best way to display photos, clippings and artifacts from Thailand. I compared 1960's and 2010's volunteer experiences on opposite sides of the board and focused on Shriver in the center section. I used the Thai suitcase for the personal story of Shriver's visit.

IV. How My Project Relates To The NHD Theme

Sargent Shriver's unique leadership abilities allowed him to create the foundation for the Peace Corps quickly and effectively despite the critics. This idea of service harnessed the energy of youth weary of wartime. A new movement of youth volunteerism emerged. Grass-roots efforts provided needed projects in developing countries, while people worked together sharing cultures and solving problems. The image of Americans abroad improved at a time when the U.S. feared the spread of communism. The Peace Corps still gives volunteers the opportunity to serve others, learn another culture, and promote goodwill. More than 215,000 volunteers have served in 140 countries over the past 54 years. Sargent Shriver's vision and leadership established the Peace Corps, helped it to prosper for over 50 years and have left a legacy of service and friendship that endures to this day.

