



A collection of essays, photos, and news

Editors: Bob and Betty Soppelsa, RPCVs, Odienné, '68-'70
Submissions to elizabeth.soppelsa[at]verizon.net

Le nouvel Observateur Monde

ACCUEIL > MONDE > COTE-D'IVOIRE. SEPT CASQUES BLEUS TUÉS EN OPÉRATION

COTE-D'IVOIRE. Sept casques bleus tués en opération

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Obs

Par [Le Nouvel Observateur avec AFP](#)

D'après les premiers éléments, une embuscade leur a été tendue dans l'ouest du pays.

Mots-clés : Côte-d'Ivoire, ONU, Casques bleus, tués, soldats, embuscade
PARTAGER

Sept Casques bleus nigériens de l'Opération des Nations unies en Côte d'Ivoire (Onuci) ont été tués vendredi 8 juin dans une "embuscade" dans l'ouest du pays. C'est la "première attaque de ce genre" contre l'Onuci, a annoncé un porte-parole de la mission.

"Selon un bilan provisoire, sept Casques bleus nigériens ont perdu la vie dans une embuscade dans l'ouest du pays, dans la zone au sud de la petite ville de Tai", près de la frontière avec le Liberia, a déclaré ce même porte-parole, sans précision sur l'identité des assaillants.

► **Read more:**
<http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/monde/20120608.OBS8058/cote-d-ivoire-sept-casques-bleus-tues-en-operation.html>

Summer Fun

Join the FOCI summer outing! We will meet for an Ivorian lunch in July or August.

Please email friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com to tell us which weekend you prefer. 🍷

La Main Tendue The reach Out Hand Foundation
Present
Ivory Coast 3rd annual Festival

SUNDAY 5TH AUGUST 2012

Artists' Performance
Exhibition of Dances
Fashion Show
Vendors
African dishes

From 10am - 9pm
One Veteran Plaza Place
Downtown Silver Spring MD

INFO LINES: 301-404-4484 / 301-356-5040 / 240-441-5937
www.lamaintendueus.org

How to Get Peace Corps Volunteers Back into "the Côte"

John Pielemeier, FOCI Advocacy Committee
[Jpielemeie\[at\]aol.com](mailto:Jpielemeie[at]aol.com)

The FOCI Advocacy Committee was formed at the 2011 Annual Meeting with one major objective: Try to get Peace Corps back into a now more peaceful Cote d'Ivoire. The members of this (hopefully) growing committee include John Pielemeier (chair), Neal Shister, Kathy Parker, and Tom Leonhardt. We are, thus far, all relatively "anciens vols," and would like some more recent RPCVs to join us.

Shortly after the committee was created, I ran into Aaron Williams (PC Director and ex-USAID) and then Stacy Rhodes (PC Chief of Staff and ex-USAID), both of whom I know well from my former USAID career. When asked about the prospects for PC returning to the Côte, both gave the same mantra: a) Gbagbo needs to leave the country; b) Security needs to be much improved; and c) PC has no budget for this program addition. One must add, of course, that the PC would need to be invited back by the Ivorian President.

There has been some progress to date on these issues. Gbagbo has departed the Côte and is awaiting trial at the International Court in the Hague. Security has improved in some regions of the country. PC has received funds from USAID to return PC to Nepal to do work in HIV-AIDS. The Nepal example is relevant also because volunteers have returned only to certain, more peaceful, regions of that country.

Get to Know the FOCI 2012 Board: Part 2

Frédéric Kouihongbe

Frederic Taly Kouihongbe (Freddy) is a native of Côte d'Ivoire (West Africa). Freddy served at Peace Corps-Côte d'Ivoire (1997-2002) in various positions from language and cross-culture trainer to cross-culture coordinator, to education program technical coordinator. Freddy moved in 2004 to the United States where he completed his graduate degree in Conflict Transformation. He lives in the state of Rhode Island with his wife Sonya Taly and two beautiful daughters, Aleah and Felicia. Freddy currently works as French teacher in a high school and in an adult education center. He is also an international development consultant working with US-based INGO operating in Sub-Saharan Africa. He likes spicy West African cuisine, dancing and soccer. 🌹

Randall Martin

Randy Martin ('74-'77) heads up USAID education projects with FHI 360 in Djibouti, the only francophone country in East Africa. Teaching English in Korhogo unexpectedly started a career in education development that has spanned public-private and civilian-military sectors in Africa and the Middle East. He tries to make it back to USA in time for a FOCI gathering at least once a year. 🌹

Bob Soppelsa, Newsletter Editor

Bob was a volunteer from 1968-70 in Odienné, with wife Betty. Currently a curator for the Department of State's Office of Art in Embassies <http://art.state.gov>, Bob is a specialist in African art history. He worked for 21 years at Washburn University and its Mulvane Art Museum in Topeka, Kansas, before moving to Washington. Bob and Betty have a son Pete, who's a historian, a daughter-in-law Jen, who's a social worker, and grandson Felix, an active toddler. 🌹

Betty Soppelsa, Newsletter Editor

Betty served in Odienné with husband Bob (above.) After a career of teaching English as a second language and directing university intensive English programs, Betty joined the staff of [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#) in 2000 and moved to Washington, DC. Betty plans an annual conference for the association which attracts nearly 9,000 participants from 130 countries. Betty and Bob are in touch with several of their PC TEFL group on a regular basis and enjoyed a TEFL reunion in 2009.



1968-70 TEFL Group at their 2009 Reunion

Thus far, unless the PC budget grows in the near future, our assumption is that the best chance for the PC to return would be if a donor agency, such as USAID, would finance the program. Our committee hopes to explore this possibility with both PC and USAID. Like Nepal, the entry program for PC might be HIV-AIDS and perhaps other health issues. PC would be able to benefit from the technical expertise of CDC and PEPFAR partners who have been working there for many years. Also, the recent G-8 summit identified CI as a 2nd-phase recipient country for the G-8's push to increase agricultural food security in Africa. However, the European Union, and not USAID, will apparently be the lead donor for this program. Another possibility would be for PC to start back via a PC Response/Crisis Corps intervention.

Two key "unknowns" are whether CI is now "secure enough" for PC leadership to seriously consider returning there; and whether the CI would invite PC back.

We plan to have a virtual committee meeting soon and, in the meantime, **would benefit from any insights you have on:**
a) key contacts/intermediaries; b) primary messages to these contacts; and c) the security situation and PCVs.

Please write to me at the address above. 🌹

Ivory Coast: Cocoa, Justice, and the Road to Reconciliation

Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting

Read the article: <http://pulitzercenter.org/projects/ivory-coast-civil-war-crimes-elections-conflict-militias-cocoa-farmers-alassane-ouattara-laurent-gbagbo>

From a series of articles by [Austin Merrill](#)



Austin Merrill is a writer and editor based in New York. Austin's introduction to Africa was as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ivory Coast, where he worked as a rural water and sanitation engineer.

With photos from [Peter DiCampo](#)



Peter DiCampo is a documentary photographer whose goal is to contribute his work to a dialogue on international development. He launched his freelance career while also working as a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural Ghana. 🌹

FOCI Grants

Help locate sustainable projects underway in Cote d'Ivoire that better the lives of Ivoirians through education.

Applications for the next round of funding are requested by November 1st to friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com. Grants up to \$1,000.

Visit the [small grants page](http://www.friendsofcotedivoire.org) at our web site www.friendsofcotedivoire.org.

Join our Facebook group!

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/8510168090/>



FOCI President's Message

Dear Friends,

In these last few months we do not have a lot to report. We still plan to have some sort of family gathering this summer in DC. As for the grant, we did not have a recipient this time around, which means it will once again double to \$1000 in November.

Not much to report on Cote d'Ivoire, chocolate, or FOCI, but I do have a great story to tell about Peace Corps friendship. Recently, I learned that fellow RPCVs Ray and Vanessa Hess with baby Hazel, were moving out to Las Vegas. That very same morning, my mom, with her abandoned house in Las Vegas, told me to take over and deal with it.

Well, it was a match made in heaven. Two of my most trusted friends (plus Hazel who seems trustworthy at 9 months) went to live and take care of my mom's house. Ray did landscaping plans, cleaned the house, and cleaned a defrosted fridge that had never been cleaned prior to the electricity being shut off four years earlier, with the remains of ice cream and fish sticks. Plus, when the electricity came back on, the fridge didn't work anyway. He also replaced the air and heating (it was over 100 degrees) and the water heater. By the time I visited to put my mom's stuff into storage, everything was working and I was served Las Vegas' finest croissants and macaroons to make packing that much better.

Ray and Vanessa probably don't want me to advertise their home as the best hotel in Vegas, and the house no longer maintains my mom's selection of fabulous sexy women art, but you will see the cutest baby ever, even when sick, and view my great grandfather's painting, which does resemble Lenin. He wasn't Lenin.

What a great time we had, and it is all thanks to Peace Corps. Thanks, Ray and Vanessa.

All the best,
Marianne

Are you a Member of FOCI?

In 2012 we are keeping our annual dues at \$15. What a small cost to support a community-building organization! **Please consider renewing your membership and contributing to our small grants projects** by sending a check to FOCI, 170 Mussey St., South Portland, ME 04106.

[A membership form is available here.](#) Thank you.

How Peace Corps Affected the Lives of RPCVs

Please send your stories to us for future issues of the newsletter.

John Green, Daloa 1968-70

Betty's note about the influence of the Peace Corps on my life, both personal and professional, could not have come at a more serendipitous moment: after 44 years, I have just stepped out of full-time work and into the yet-to-be-written "next chapter."

I served in Côte d'Ivoire from 1968 to 1970 and taught English by day at the Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire de Daloa and by night tutored local civil servants preparing for advancement exams. These two years have had a profound influence on my life, yet I've never before attempted to analyze just how my decisions and values have been guided by my Peace Corps experience.

I loved the challenge of living and working in French. I discovered that teaching "fit." and the classroom provided a lab to understand my students and the traditions and cultures of their varied backgrounds. Living alone at a crossroads, I often played host to assorted (and sordid) travelers in and out of the PC. I, too, traveled widely and frequently throughout western and northern Africa. These are the tangibles.

My US-centric vision was forever altered. My curiosity about people and places grew. My patience with injustice erupted into forms of activism. My optimism for the world dampened. My belief in political and religious institutions waned. These are the intangibles.

During the years following the Peace Corps, I taught ESL at Brooklyn College, the influence of both my PC training and experience being quite obvious! However, a large number of my students were recent arrivals to New York City from Haiti and my language skills and understanding of the French education system were tremendous assets both in the classroom and in my role as academic advisor.

The greatest influence, however, remains in the intangible category. Most of my working years were in administrative positions within large, complex educational institutions. I truly believe that my success was due, to a large measure, to understanding the role of culture – both institutional and personal – in planning, implementing and assessing. I remember oh too clearly how painful it was to be French "debutant" in PC training and how critical it became to listen. We learned to speak French by listening and my ability to listen intently became a key skill in my management style over the years.

Last year, I married John Phillips, an RPCV (Micronesia), during the first week of the Marriage Equality Law in New York -

36 years after we became a couple! So, the Peace Corps remains a very active and historic part of my personal life as well.



Tom Leonhardt, 1965-67

I think the Peace Corps experience changes everyone's life. It certainly did mine. Returning to the States in December of 1967 from the Côte d'Ivoire (where I was in health education and school gardens) was a real wake-up call. I taught school for 9 years in the DC area.

After a sabbatical, I then felt the need to go into international development work. It took a while to break into the profession. I spent the next 30 or so years doing consulting work for NGO's, PVO's, USAID, CDC and other groups working in developing countries. I worked in various sectors but mainly health, water and sanitation, and family planning. Training and facilitation were specialties.

Three years ago I semi-retired to Portland, Maine and have been donating my services to local non-profits on a pro bono basis. Two of my current "clients" are Konbit Santé, working in Cap Haitien, Haiti, and the Community Financial Literacy Project, training recent immigrants to the USA in financial literacy.



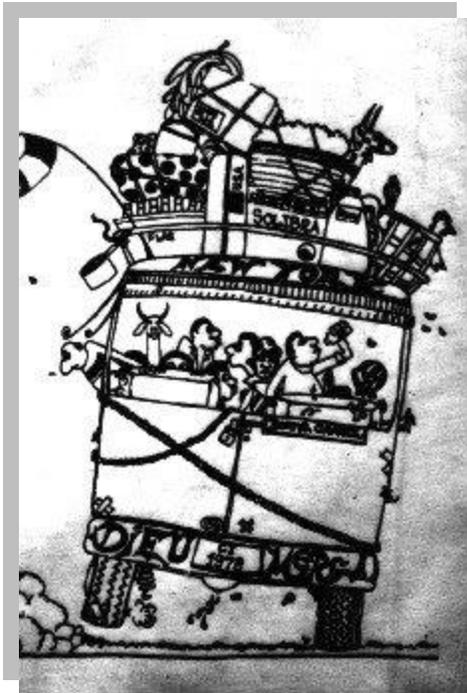
**Photo of Peace Corps training T-shirt
Posted on the FOCI Facebook page
by Russ Holden**

Who designed this?

Announcements/Requests

Do you have some information to share? Or need information? Send your requests to [Elizabeth.soppelsa\[at\]verizon.net](mailto:Elizabeth.soppelsa[at]verizon.net) for a future issue.

- ❖ **Have you read this book?** *Voices from the Peace Corps: Fifty Years of Kentucky Volunteers*, Angene Wilson and Jack Wilson, University Press of Kentucky, 2011. The authors are RPCVs from Liberia.
- ❖ **Book List.** We are trying to create a list of Ivoirian writers or Ivoirian-themed books to add to our Website. Send your lists to friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com to help create the master list.
- ❖ **Identify yourself!** Send an e-mail with your latest contact information (e-mail and snail mail addresses) to friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com



**Picture of 1976 RCI training T-shirt .
Posted on the FOCI Facebook page
by Gerald Plotkin**

Who designed this?



Are you a member of the National Peace Corps Association? Join now at <http://www.rpcv.org/>



**Bob and Betty Soppelsa,
PC training, 1968**

Thanks to all who contributed to this newsletter!

Please send your stories, photos, book reviews, announcements, and ideas for the next issue to [elizabeth.soppelsa\[at\]verizon.net](mailto:elizabeth.soppelsa[at]verizon.net).