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THE INSTITUTE OF INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS

(AN AGENCY OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT)

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The story of its progress in two articles, entitled:

- **WE'RE BUILDING A BETTER HEMISPHERE**
- **MIRACLE ON THE AMAZON**

By John W. White

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(According to the United States Secretary of State, the program of the Institute of Inter-American Affairs in the other American Republics, has been "the inspiration and the proving ground" for President Truman's Point IV cooperative technical assistance program)

ELVIN A. DUERST

Raimundo Vera, shown with family, is one of 570 starving men settled in Misiones Colony, Paraguay, two years ago. Now he's a happy landowner

We're Building
A BETTER HEMISPHERE

Living standards in Latin America have been boosted by a U.S. project that sets a pattern for our Point Four program

By JOHN W. WHITE

Children like these are being taught to read and to brush their teeth, and their illiterate, poverty-ridden parents are learning with them

Vocational schools established by Americans are teaching girls how to keep house and boys how to make a living. This one is in Bolivia

I

Asunción, Paraguay

IF YOU knew that one small penny out of every hundred dollars you paid in taxes could speed the day of world peace, the chances are that your reluctant tilts with the tax collector would take on all the joyful aspects of a love feast.

The sensational fact is that—unknown to most Americans—a single tax cent from each of us *is* substantially advancing peace by helping change the face of almost an entire continent, one of key importance to us and at the same time of fierce interest to the Communists.

Thanks to a surprisingly low-cost U.S. program little publicized back home, myriads of hitherto half-starved, ragged and ill-housed Latin Americans in 16 of the 21 republics to the south of the United States, subsisting in the squalor and misery on which the Communist Lorelei battens, have won a spectacular new lease on life.

They have been cured of the malaria and other diseases which for centuries chained them to a subhuman level of existence.

They are growing as much as 50 per cent more food on the same acreage; for the first time, eating nourishing, vitamin-rich meals.

The little farmers are making money where they never did before. They are building clean, solid homes to replace the filthy hovels in which their families have always lived.

Their children, for the first time are going to school, their young men acquiring trades.

The grownups themselves are learning how to work, to profit more from their work, and to plan for the sensible spending of the money they earn.

People on the land—their kind comprises two thirds of Latin America—now have something to live for. The poorest, unhealthiest, unhappiest, most ignorant and neglected—and therefore the easiest of targets for Red sweet-talk—they have begun to see themselves as members of the property-owning system instead of its victims. They know that back of their new well-being are the *yanquis* they have been told are heartless imperialists. They are being converted into friends and followers of our capitalistic, democratic way of life.

In this remarkable new-world-in-the-making below the Rio Grande, the conversion process is as yet by no means complete. A continent is neither economically nor socially remade overnight. And the Kremlin's courtship goes on apace. But with the final outcome in our favor, credit will beyond question belong to a quiet, grass-roots operation directed by a fledgling U.S. government outfit, The Institute of Inter-American Affairs.

The institute, which last June was incorporated into the larger Point Four program, began its work south of the border, however, well before that program was even enunciated. The way in which it has furnished technical help to our underdeveloped hemisphere neighbors has provided Point Four with a model to be followed in underdeveloped areas elsewhere in the world. Point Four projects are getting under way in Afghanistan, Ceylon, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Haiti, India, Iran, Mexico, Pakistan and Thailand. Logically enough, Nelson Rockefeller, who launched the institute, is now planning chief for Point Four.

Working in close harness with the governments concerned, the institute is engaged in a far-flung frontal assault on three major problems of Latin-American life: health and sanitation, food production and education. Unlike many a past program of betterment, it is minus the high-sounding platitudes and the experts who came, saw, wrote a report and went home. The institute's operation is a sleeves-rolled-up, follow-through affair. It is a prime example of America at its best—demonstrating know-how. And it has worked.

The institute has 25 separate projects going: health and sanitation projects in 14 republics, education in seven, food supply in four. Some of the countries have taken on two projects, and in Peru and here in Paraguay they are tackling all three at once.

The technique is simple. The institute sends American doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers and/or farm experts to the country that asks for help. This field party organizes and trains a team of local men and women. The team becomes a bureau in the host country's ministry of health, education or agriculture. The American field-party chief heads this bureau, and is responsible to the appropriate Cabinet minister as well as to institute headquarters in Washington.

Trainees Acquire American Know-How

Together the Americans and trainees study a particular problem. The Americans contribute know-how, the trainees their knowledge of local conditions, customs and prejudices. This pattern of co-operation has become known as a *servicio*, so called because the bureau is titled the *Servicio Co-operativo* of health, education or food supply, as the case may be.

Once the *servicio* works out a solution to a problem it gets the Cabinet minister's go-ahead. A crew promptly goes out into the field to put the technical recommendations into effect. It is this local crew, guided by American experts, that is the key to institute success; past U.S. programs of technical aid to foreign countries failed because they hadn't the ground organization to follow through on the experts' advice. The institute withdraws the Americans as rapidly as the trainees learn our methods.

The lowly potato is a case in point of how such teamwork operates. Originally the potato came not from Ireland, but from the highlands of Peru. The method of growing it there was as ancient as the crop itself. To have tried direct contact between an American farm expert and the notoriously suspicious Peruvian farmer on ways to improve his output would have taken years.

So an American expert trained a Peruvian crewman in seed selection and spraying. The Peruvian journeyed into the back country and, talking the language of its reticent inhabitants, persuaded just three farmers to follow his instructions. That year they got five times as many potatoes per acre as the year before, with profits

The U.S. and the World

It was in his inaugural address of January, 1949, that President Truman first gave voice to the idea of the program now known as Point Four. Listing his foreign-policy aims, he cited as the fourth point a "bold new program" to provide American technical aid to the world's underdeveloped areas, to help those areas help themselves to a better life. The launching of this program, with its unique blend of realism and idealism, was fatefully timed. Point Four, which actively engaged us in the business of peace, was officially begun only a few weeks before Korea actively engaged us in the business of war.

Headed by Dr. Henry Garland Bennett, president of Oklahoma A&M College, with Nelson Rockefeller as planning chief, Point Four got a $34,500,000 sendoff from Congress and now has projects under way in 39 countries throughout the world.

Necessarily long-range, this vast endeavor will not be ready to be judged on its achievements for some time to come. But we can get an idea of its potential from a smaller U.S. program, recently brought into the Point Four setup, which has been under way since 1943 in 16 of the 21 republics to the south of us. This Latin-American program, according to Dean Acheson, has been "the inspiration and the proving ground" for Point Four.

What the U.S. is doing below the border is, in effect, showing off its best side: quietly, without fanfare, spreading know-how, helping the common man of Latin America lift himself out of the misery of centuries, teaching him how to make his own country a better place to live. Proof of what Point Four can do for underdeveloped countries anywhere, this American effort—despite Red attempts to smear it as imperialism—has had but one motive: to give the neighbors a hand and thereby make the community—our one world—a happier place for us all.

To get the Latin-American story, Collier's sent John W. White on an extensive tour of the Southern continent. A leading authority on the lands below the Rio Grande, he worked as a newspaperman there for 25 years, 10 of them as chief South American correspondent for the New York Times. THE EDITORS

Peruvian Indians, shown threshing grain with flails, were told by farming experts they must abandon such methods to earn more money

Some Peruvian Indians still use ancient methods, but these farmers and many others rent U.S. equipment from a low-cost machinery pool

respectively of $195, $310 and $370 per acre. Their potato-growing neighbors lost an average of $25 per acre. From such small but tangible beginnings it was not hard to spread the gospel of American farming methods.

The institute Americans do not stay closeted at their offices. They all spend plenty of time among the farmers, townspeople and Indians, with resulting esteem for the *yanquis*. One of the program's more notable achievements is that though it is fashioning what amounts to social revolution, it has roused no popular tensions or fears of dollar diplomacy, despite Red attempts to paint it as sinister imperialism.

When the Americans Are Gone

Of 300 Americans brought south by the institute, all but 140 have already gone home, their coaching mission accomplished. The remainder head up an organization of 15,000 local citizens, 1,500 of whom are now technicians themselves, superbly trained to take over when the last American leaves.

Financially, too, the keynote of the institute program is co-operation, not charity. The institute's yearly share of the cost has been about $250,000 per republic, a total of $5,000,000—or about one and a third cents per U.S. taxpayer. (Congress recently upped the appropriation to cover institute operations for the next five years and earmarked $7,000,000 for the current fiscal year.) This relatively small sum, apart from the Americans' salaries, has been entirely spent in the U.S. for supplies.

On the other hand, each republic has put in five to 10 times as much money; the institute, in fact, does not put up its share until the host government does. For Brazil's educational program, for instance, we contributed $125,000 up to June, 1949. Brazil itself put in $489,000, spent another $145,000 to train Brazilian teachers in the U.S., and another $77,000 to buy school supplies in the U.S.

Furthermore, those at home who view all our foreign-aid ventures as money poured down a rathole might note this: U.S. exports of farm machinery and tools alone to the four republics with food-production programs rose from $976,000 in 1944 to $5,107,000 last year. Thus a far from minor by-product of the institute operation has been the building of a new and profitable market for U.S. manufacturers.

The institute program had its roots in World War II, when we sent down farm experts, doctors and nurses to provide foodstuffs for GIs at our South and Central American bases and guard the health of jungle workers looking for rubber, balsa wood and other war materials. After V-J day, all the republics except Argentina and Cuba appealed to Washington to keep the program going for the benefit of their own underprivileged.

The job begun by Nelson Rockefeller as Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs was handed over to a newly created Institute of Inter-American Affairs, functioning as an autonomous government corporation under the State Department. Originally the institute took on 18 of the republics, but its technicians have since finished up in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic and wholly turned over their work there to these countries.

That the institute has succeeded brilliantly was plainly evident to me in a 7,000-mile swing by air, boat, car and on foot through South and Central America. You would have to know what life was like in the interior of these republics 10 or 20 years ago—as I did as a working newspaperman—to get a full understanding of what an astounding change has already taken place.

People down here are not only living differently, they are thinking differently. They even look better, and not just because of their new clothes. Much of their new look is in their faces. Today they laugh and joke as they go about their daily chores for no reason except that they are healthy and happy. Ten years ago, more than half the babies of South America died at birth or a few months later. Now they are growing into noisy, rollicking youngsters like our own.

Even the land looks changed as you drive along the highways. In Peru, cornfields used to be planted in bunches; now they're planted in neat rows. Orchards look like orchards instead of like patches of jungle brush with the trees smothered by weeds. Tomatoes, figs and oranges used to be only for the wealthy; today they are on the tables of workingmen all through the year.

Altogether, it's a bright new world that didn't exist even in the Latin Americans' dreams a decade ago—they just didn't know how to dream that way.

One particularly bright chapter in the institute story is what it is doing for young boys otherwise slated for unemployment or wretched poverty on the land. In Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay and Peru, institute experts are directing vocational schools—and teaching local teachers how to run them—at which thousands of teen-agers are learning plumbing, carpentry, auto and radio repair, and other trades which will earn them good wages. American textbooks have been translated into Spanish and Portuguese, and shopwork standards are those required in the U.S. These schools have spent more for American-made equipment than the U.S. has spent on the educational program.

At the institute vocational school in Panama I saw boys at work in a home-building course which has already borne fruit in replacing the primitive huts of the Isthmus with clean, modern houses. Here in Asunción I watched young enthusiasts absorbing the fundamentals of electricity and plumbing; they had installed all the fittings for the orphanage that the institute's health division built to isolate children from parents afflicted with leprosy. In Bolivia and Brazil I watched vocational students—using made-in-U.S.A. hammers, saws, planes and lathes—making desks and seats for the institute's rural schools.

These rural schools are the other major aspect of the institute's educational program. Their effectiveness—particularly on the great high plateau of South America known as the Altiplano—is one of the most dramatic educational achievements in all human history.

The Altiplano, 1,500 miles long, as far as from Miami to Minneapolis, lies between the two towering main ranges of the Andes, and forms an important part of Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. Few Americans ever set foot on it. It is one of the dreariest, most remote, and least inviting stretches on earth. On it live about 5,000,000 Quechua and Aymara Indians, descendants of the mighty Incas.

For over 400 years, ever since the Spaniards came, these Indians have lived in rat-ridden, smoke-filled hovels without windows or chimneys, sleeping on dirt floors in close proximity with pigs and goats, cooking over fires of llama dung. The whites treated them worse than animals. If your car killed an Indian and his pack donkey, you were fined more for killing the donkey than for killing the Indian. Donkeys are scarce—Indians plentiful.

Under these conditions it was not surprising that the Indians were stubbornly deaf to white suggestions about self-improvement. But in the past five years, through the schooling of their young, the institute is helping incorporate them into the national life, educating them to be citizens of their own countries. Little Jorge and Rosita take home the lessons they learn; papa and mama finally weaken when the kids, aided by a few classmates, clean up the house on a home project outlined by the institute teacher.

I saw whole communities rebuilt with houses which have windows, and bright blue tile roofs instead of lice-filled thatches. Cooking and eating utensils have been taken away from the rats on the floor and stored in niches built into the wall. The incredible stench is gone.

Using a school system originated in Bolivia but permitted through various changes of government to go to seed, institute experts and the teachers and supervisors they locally trained started on the premise that the three R's were a minor problem. Before any attempt was made to teach the children letters, they were taught how to bathe, wash their hands, comb their hair. They had never seen soap; now they make it at school and show their parents how to use it. At school, they prepare and eat a nutritious midday meal, sitting on adobe benches at adobe tables instead of eating off the floor. This novelty has put tables and benches into their own homes.

Seen in an Indian Village

I visited the sunny little Indian village of Kalaque, on the shores of Lake Titicaca, two and a half miles above sea level on the Altiplano. The blades of a wind charger made in Clarinda, Iowa, spun a shimmering pattern above the school roof, charging the batteries for the children's American-made radio. Other things in Kalaque were no less incongruous. American teaching methods are being successfully used by teachers who can't speak a syllable of English. Textbooks have been translated into two Indian languages – Aymara and Quechua – in which symbols were used as words.

The Kalaque school has, in addition to four teachers, three specialists. One shows the pupils how to keep clean and well, with soap, towel and comb. The second shows them how to raise vegetables in home gardens, and teaches older boys how to get better crops in the field. The third, a home-economics technician, shows the youngsters how to keep house and prepare meals.

Half a dozen of these bright-eyed children proudly took me through their homes. They had cut niches in the walls for dishes; painted and papered; put magazine pictures where the soot had been; cut windows to let in light and air; laid wooden floors. Kalaque's youngsters are growing better corn than their fathers raised, and the boys, instructed in animal breeding, are getting six pounds of wool per sheep where their elders got one pound.

The grownups are so impressed that they regard the schoolhouse as a sort of temple, and tip their hats whenever they pass by.

No less startling than this integration of the Altiplano Indians into society is the change wrought by an entirely separate institute program—food production—on an entirely different but equally tough-to-crack sector of South Americans, the little farmers of Peru.

Nowhere in the world were farmers more suspicious of their neighbors. Each man, using his wooden plow, his bullock, his primitive farming methods inherited from his ancestors, was a complete isolationist. Everything he did was jealously guarded from his neighbor.

Then, somehow, the Peruvian hinterlander began to hear and see evidences of what the institute's farm-extension agents were teaching. Even the most illiterate knew that one agent couldn't possibly see each man in his district once a year. So each district's farmers got together, organized an association, and elected a small committee to attend the agent's demonstrations and pass along what was learned to the folks back in the interior.

Institute Agents at Work

Unwittingly, these committees have become centers of democratic action. Farmers have learned to air all their problems among themselves and adopt the decision that gets the majority vote. And along with this tiny seed of democracy has come a revolution in farming. In 1949 alone the institute's 30 agents in Peru demonstrated American know-how to 800,000 farmers through 123 rural committees. Missionaries of a new life, the agents wander along country roads with machetes in their belts, pruning shears in their hands, insecticide sprays over their shoulders, pruning, spraying, clearing away the undergrowth.

The institute imported a lot of U.S. farm machinery, organized it into 19 pools, and made it available to the Peruvians at low cost. Its technicians rehabilitated 63,000 acres of abandoned farms; they persuaded farmers to dig up their perennial cotton and instead plant a high-yield annual type known as Pima, following it with food crops like beans and potatoes. Scientific spraying has increased alfalfa production from four tons an acre to six. The rice crop has been increased by half.

Last year, with 10 per cent less land under cultivation, Peru's farmers produced 30 per cent more food crops and sold them for three times as much money as in 1943, the year the Americans came in. For the first time in the nation's history, farming has become actually a desirable way to live.

Of all institute achievements throughout the republics, however, none has made more of a dent on the entire economy of a nation than its work right here in Paraguay. This landlocked country at the center of the South American continent, about the size of Montana, with a population of 1,200,000, has had the benefit of all three institute operations—health and sanitation, food supply and education. The result has been a hopeful preview of what can happen wherever whole underdeveloped areas get a chance.

Paraguay's has been a subsistence economy, almost exclusively agricultural. Only 100 farmers in all the republic had had more than 50 acres; 65 per cent of the farm population were squatters, undernourished, living in dirty one-room huts. Under a supervised farm-credit system copied after our own, the institute is turning Paraguay into a money-making economy, raising the standard of living and making property owners out of have-nots.

Institute technicians began in 1946 by settling 35 hand-picked families on a pilot colony at Piraretá, near Asunción. Each received 57 acres on easy payments. The Americans showed them how to lay out their land in money crops, pasturage for work animals and a cow or two, and vegetable gardens to raise their own food. The experts tested some 2,000 types of seeds of money and food crops and adopted over 100 as suitable for Paraguay. Paraguayans everywhere now start out with good seed.

With the lessons learned at the pilot colony, the government two years ago laid out and colonized under institute guidance 78,000 acres in the beautiful farm region near the country's southern border. With their families, 570 penniless men—chosen by committees of neighbors who could vouch for their character and industry, since none of them had credit ratings—were settled at this, the Misiones colony.

The Bank of Paraguay financed the con-

struction of their houses, the purchase of U.S.-made farm machinery and a cow, then gave them enough cash to live on until the first harvest. They have 10 years to pay for the land, five years for the machinery and animals. Credit supervisors confer with the colonists at the start of the crop year, help them decide what and how much to plant, and see to it that enough money crops, such as cotton, beans, peanuts and yucca, are set out to take care of the annual payment to the bank and yet leave sufficient cash for family needs. Bank collections are running over 90 per cent—a good record in any country.

So successful has the Misiones colony proved that Paraguay is laying out two more huge colonies and planning to invite back home to settle some 100,000 Paraguayans who wandered over the border into Argentina and Brazil because they could not eke out a living in their own country.

President Chavez of Paraguay said to me: "Tell them in Collier's that the three operations of the institute are the greatest thing the United States has ever done in the way of co-operating with the American republics. These three operations are much more important to our welfare than all the money the United States has loaned to the Southern nations."

Raimundo Vera, one of the Misiones pioneers, put it to me another way. "The *nortes*," he grinned, "are great people."

Vera had never heard of Point Four. When I mentioned it, he stared blankly and asked the institute man with me, "What's the señor talking about?" but whether Vera knows it or not, he is a magnificent example of the miracles that can happen to individuals in the course of developing backward areas.

Two years ago Vera was an oxcart driver who, after 12 years on the job, owned a two-wheeled cart worth about $10, four oxen, two horses, a saddle and a few rusty tools, adding up to a total capital of about $100. He, his wife, and three children lived in a run-down one-room hut.

Today, at thirty-eight, Vera is a middle-class property-owning farmer of the type on which our democracy is based. He has built a three-room brick house, and owns 145 acres of land, four cows, eight bullocks, two calves, two horses, and numerous pigs and chickens. He's in debt, but he has a supervised program for getting out of it, and is making five times as much as the average Paraguayan farmer. He has seven pieces of American farm machinery; they enable him to work seven times as much land as most farmers handle with a hoe.

When the credit supervisor calls on Vera, he is accompanied by a lively young woman on horseback, an institute-trained home economist. By the time she and Vera's thirty-five-year-old wife, Florentina, get through mapping the homemaking projects for the year, the head of the house has his nose mortgaged to the grindstone for months to come. But the Veras love it; for them it's a new adventure in living.

The house is comfortably furnished with things bought by Florentina out of the credit allowance. Curtains, for one. Who ever heard of curtains on a Paraguayan farm? The Veras and the children—there are four, now—sleep in beds, not on the floor as they used to. Instead of cooking over a fire on the ground, Florentina uses American utensils over a stove in the kitchen. There is a deep-water well outside. The children go to the colony school.

Introducing Mr. Patterson

The American field-party chief directing Paraguay's food supply program is Albion W. (Pat) Patterson. Born in Springfield, Massachusetts, Princeton-educated, in his early forties, Pat was never a farmer himself, but probably no one in the republic can match his knowledge of agriculture in all its phases. Any day in the week his tall, lanky figure can be seen at the 27,000-acre farm at Barrerito, where institute technicians are cross-breeding beef cattle, or at the seed-development farm at Caacupé, or at the model dairy farm at San Lorenzo. On the road, coming and going, Pat is likely to drop in at various domestic work centers, where home economists are teaching Paraguayan women table manners, how to serve a meal, make a dress, or keep household accounts.

These home economists were trained by another notable institute envoy, a stocky, energetic brunette, Mrs. Josefa Hardin, of Puerto Rico. Mrs. Hardin recently resigned from the institute because of her mother's ill-health, but as home-management officer of the institute for four years, she trained more than 100 local girls as home-economics supervisors in Paraguay, Costa Rica and Venezuela. Her teaching has left a permanent imprint on family life on the Southern continent.

Peru's phenomenal metamorphosis into a prosperous nation has been directed by an ex-cowboy and farm-extension agent, John R. Neale. At one time state director in Wyoming for the Farm Security Administration, Jack Neale—working with only nine American technicians and 30 extension agents—has managed to chalk up the astounding record of reaching nearly 1,000,000 Peruvian farmers in 1949 alone with a farm-extension service patterned after our own.

The institute's American ambassadors—drawn from all over the states—are a quiet, hard-working kind, convinced of the rightness of their mission. Perhaps none better exemplifies their spirit than Lucia Page, a tall, good-natured Texas brunette just turned fifty, a specialist in elementary education who used to work for the U.S. Indian Service. Miss Page's bailiwick is the Altiplano. She has written first- and second-grade readers in Spanish letters that convey Aymara and Quechua sounds which have never before been put in writing.

A Question Over the Teacup

As she travels over the high plateau, Miss Page carries her own bedding and a gasoline stove on which she prepares her own meals. One afternoon at the Indian school at Warizata, on the Altiplano, she brewed me a cup of tea and we sat talking. I asked her how she stood the primitive life. "What do you mean?" she demanded. "It's a great job, and I love it!" Miss Page bridled as though I had criticized Texas.

So successful have been the institute's projects that in several countries they have weathered revolutions, *coups d'état*, and other changes in regime. Paraguay has had 14 such changes and the institute program is stronger than ever. Native-born citizens of one country told me that any government trying to drop the institute's work would be thrown out of office overnight.

Only in one instance has the institute met with trouble. Only last September, politically powerful Red labor leaders in Guatemala succeeded in putting pressure on Guatemala's President to drop an institute rural-education program which had been running for six years.

Such Communist sniping, under the slogan of anti-Americanism, will continue unabated, for to the Reds the institute is a hated and feared symbol of democracy really going to bat. How much headway such agitation will make, however, would seem to be best illustrated by a story Raimundo Vera volunteered during my visit to his cheerful new stronghold.

Just the week before he had been paid a call by a Communist organizer who listed all the benefits coming Vera's way "come the revolution." One benefit, said the Red, would be that the revolution would take all the land from the landlords and distribute it to the poor.

That was a mistake. "What!" Vera shouted. "You mean you're going to take all this away from me? Get out of here. Get started—quick!"

Vera's black eyes snapped. Under his broad straw hat appeared the grin which has been a recent acquisition along with his new prestige as a man of property. "I chased the guy off my place," he chuckled.

Giving the Latin American a chance at new agricultural prosperity would have been of little avail without bringing him health. In next week's issue, the author tells how the U.S. program has improved both the health and sanitary conditions of 23,000,000 people. Order Collier's from your local news dealer now

Maria José Ribeiro, in nurse's uniform, inspects a vegetable garden she showed health club members how to plant. Gardening is one of 50 things she learned, to get her $90-a-month job

One of Maria José's most difficult tasks is to banish ignorant folks' fear of hospitals

Concluding ***WE'RE BUILDING A BETTER HEMISPHERE***

MIRACLE

Dr. Duval G. Tinoco, who was sent to the U.S. to study, examines a baby, held by Maria José, in Cametá, Brazil

Thatched huts along the riverbanks are gradually being replaced by modern dwellings. All homes are sprayed three times a year, and malaria has been eliminated in many pest spots

on the AMAZON

By JOHN W. WHITE

Disease and poverty are being driven from the great river basin by an American-launched program, which in one Brazilian town has cut the yearly death rate from 20 per 100 to 7

Among the foreign policy aims which President Truman outlined in his 1950 inaugural address was a "bold new program" to provide American technical aid to the backward and undeveloped areas of the world. The program, now under way in 39 countries, is known as Point Four. But seven years earlier, a campaign was launched to lift the standards of health, education and agriculture in Latin America. This successful campaign set a pattern for world-wide Point Four

II

Belém, Brazil

OF THE $40,000,000,000 which Americans yield up in taxes every year, none is better or more excitingly spent than the $9 which each month goes to a black-eyed, black-haired, olive-skinned twenty-three-year-old Brazilian *senhorita* named Maria José Ribeiro.

Maria José is only four feet eleven, and weighs a mere 89 pounds. At first she would reply no more than *"Sim, senhor"* or *"Não, senhor"* to my queries, but her timid voice expressed all the music in the Portuguese language, and her even teeth flashed a quick smile. Maria José Ribeiro is completely *simpática*.

Also, she is one of the tiniest cogs in a new kind of war machine with which the United States government, through its Institute of Inter-American Affairs, has fought a magnificent battle in 14 of the 21 republics south of the U.S. to free millions from the centuries-long bondage of disease and dirt which made their lives no better than that of animals.

The institute now carries on the Latin-America part of the Point Four program launched by the United States last July to help the backward, distressed nations of the world to help themselves to a better life.

The program—which seeks to raise standards of health and sanitation, agriculture and education—has got under way in 39 countries.

Maria José is a visiting nurse's aide, trained in American medical know-how, and her post is Cametá, Brazil, a little river town of 3,000 not far from here on the Amazon. Eight years ago, Cametá was notorious as one of the worst pestholes on the Amazon, itself known as a green hell. Today Cametá's death rate is lower than ours back home, and Maria José helped lower it.

This slim young *visitadora* and several hundreds like her have, in fact, helped write one of the most heart-warming chapters in the history of man's attempt to help his fellow man, and one of the most ambitious.

In seven years the institute, working through U.S. doctors, nurses, technicians and Latin Americans coached by them, has improved the health and sanitary conditions of some 23,000,000 people —one in every six south of the Rio Grande.

This project, so gigantic as to defy the imagination, began on a note of strictly American self-interest. But soon—well before President Truman announced the Point Four program—it turned into a full-scale fight to help this underdeveloped neighbor continent of ours help itself to a better life and shed the weaknesses which make it prey to Communism.

During World War II's most desperate phase, in 1942, when we urgently needed the rubber and other raw materials of the Amazon Valley, the men we sent into its steaming jungles required protection from the diseases which had always plagued the river people. The U.S. and Brazil agreed on a co-operative health program. Nelson Rockefeller, then Co-ordinator of Inter-American Affairs, asked Major General George C. Dunham to fly South and organize it.

Dunham, who had helped clean up the Canal Zone and the Philippines, was a natural for the job. Traveling 400,000 miles in Brazil, he set up hospitals, dispensaries, clinics and public health centers—all co-operative projects in which American doctors and nurses passed on public-health know-how to Brazilians. When the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, an autonomous outfit under the State Department, was organized to take over some of the co-ordinator's duties, Dunham returned to Washington.

Co-operative programs similar to Brazil's were set up in the other republics where we had bases or needed war materials. Eventually, we had 336 U.S. doctors, nurses, lab workers and other technicians working in all the republics except Argentina and Cuba. As fast as they could, the Americans trained local people and returned home. Only 140 Americans now are left in the field; but with them today are some 10,000 local doctors, nurses and technicians, many of them trained at U.S. universities on scholarships.

In time the institute took on two other major Latin-American headaches besides health: food production and education. But because no man can think of farming or schooling when he is sick and disease-ridden, health-and-sanitation remains the institute's biggest program, and in many ways its most spectacular.

Certainly one of the most gripping human achievements of all time is the institute's cleanup of the strange jungle-and-water world of the Amazon Valley.

Superimposed on the United States, this fabulous region would reach from Manhattan to Yellowstone Park, from Duluth to New Orleans. The Boundaries Commission here in Belém, which is mapping the area, wouldn't even venture a guess for me as to how many thousands of miles of rivers flow into the Amazon; they do know, though, that only one of the many islands in the Amazon delta is bigger than Switzerland.

Few Children Survived First Year

The Amazon is a place of serious endemics that feed on the underfed state of its people. Living in thatched huts (now gradually being replaced by modern dwellings) along the riverbanks or a mile or two inland, most of these wretches, until the institute came, ate only fish, yucca root and a small palm berry called *assashy*. The few children who survived their first year went naked, their sorry little bellies protruding tightly over their overloads of worms.

Perhaps you, as a tourist, have seen some of the undernourished riverfolk and thought them lazy sleepers-in-the-sun. The grim truth is that the Amazon's 1,500,000 inhabitants carried around in their abdomens three and a half tons of intestinal worms—hardly a spur to enterprise. The region's intestinal parasites include almost everything in the catalogue, from near-invisible hookworms to six-foot tapeworms; thousands of people walked around with two pounds or more of 10-inch roundworms inside them. And if that were not enough, 90 per cent of the Amazon's population had malaria.

Before the arrival of the institute's SESP —*Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública*, Portuguese for Special Public Health Service—there were two physicians in the roughly 2,000,000 square miles of Amazon region. People were born, managed somehow to exist for 30 or 40 years, then died.

How all this has changed is told in some cold, clear statistics on Cametá, the small shipping point 80 miles above Belém where Maria José Ribeiro operates. The yearly death rate there used to be 200 out of every 1,000; by 1948, Brazilian doctors and nurses trained by institute public-health personnel had the rate down to 9 per 100, a little better than our own all-time low in the U.S., the same year, of 9.9. In 1949, Cametá's rate slid down to 7.

The first thing they tell you in Cametá is: "More than a third of the population are children!" They say it with an exclamation point in their voices. Cametá babies used to die almost as fast as they were born. Now there are 1,158 lively youngsters underfoot.

But these are only statistics. To get the story behind them, to understand how such a miracle could have been effected, I went along with Maria José, trig in the blue-and-white-striped seersucker dress which is her uniform, on one of her morning rounds.

We left the new Cametá health center, a modern one-story brick building surrounded by neat lawns and gardens filled with flowers and vegetables, in the blazing heat of 8:00 A.M.

The little *visitadora* swung over her shoulder the strap of a big, heavy, black leather bag; among its many contents were the file cards of all members of the five families she aimed to visit before noon.

The Visitadora's First Call

At the first house, Maria José opened her bag, took out a piece of white paper, unfolded it on the kitchen table, and neatly settled the bag on it. She then took out her own soap and towel, washed and dried her hands, walked over to the clean white crib near the window, and solemnly patted the baby in it.

"Joaozinho is six months old today," she reminded his smiling mother. "Time to begin changing his feeding habits. Be sure to come to the center this afternoon so the doctor can examine him and I can weigh him."

Carefully she explained how to start feeding little John orange juice, tomato juice and soup; it was akin to teaching an American housewife how to prepare Martian pheasant. Maria José made pertinent notations on the baby's file card, then took five envelopes of seed from her bag, went out behind the house and planted a row each of carrots, lima beans, string beans, turnips and eggplant. The soil had been prepared according to instructions she had left on her last visit.

She explained to me: "Three months from today, the baby will be weaned, and these vitamin-rich vegetables will be ready for him." Strange talk for the Amazon!

Planting vegetables was just one of fifty things Maria José had to learn to qualify as a *visitadora*, including medical ethics and professional secrecy, how to take blood samples, how to bathe a baby, how to raise chickens, how to sterilize surgical instruments, how to care for a woman during labor, and how to set a schoolboy's broken arm. One of her most important jobs was to learn how to talk sick people out of their fear of hospitals; hordes of Amazon folk have died because of this fear.

My second call with Maria José was on a young lady celebrating her third birthday. Out of the big black bag came an American-made toothbrush and a tube of American tooth paste. The mother was more intrigued than the little girl; it was the first toothbrush she had ever seen.

Maria José took the child to the kitchen sink and showed her how to use the strange implements. The lesson was a flop; it wound up in tears and sobs. But the child promised to try it every morning, and Maria José in turn promised a nice surprise if she had learned to brush her teeth by the next visit.

At our fifth and last call, I was treated to the unexpected sight of the shy and amiable Maria blowing up. She snapped at the young mother: "Why didn't you come to the clinic? You had an appointment! Think the doctor has nothing else to do but wait for you?" Getting a mother and baby to the center for examination when the child is a month old is one of the *visitadora's* toughest jobs, for Amazon women are superstitious about leaving the house until 40 days after they have given birth.

By noon, Maria José had checked the health of 16 people; collected samples of urine, blood and spittle for laboratory analysis; checked the feeding of four infants and the pulse and temperature of their mothers; and given helpful information to a young wife pregnant for the first time.

Nor was this a cue to call it a day. In the afternoon, Maria José, acting as clinic receptionist, helped examine 18 patients and wrote out the doctor's instructions for them, promising to explain them on her next visit for those who could not read. When I left, she was planning, for the next day, her weekly class for midwives, and, for the day after that, her talk to the juvenile health club.

These clubs, for boys and girls from seven to fourteen, are yet another institute "first" on the Amazon. On the sensible theory that these youngsters will largely mold the future of their communities, institute experts have taught club members personal hygiene and home sanitation. They are under word-of-honor pledges to enter—truthfully—on their own charts the daily care of their teeth and other personal functions. They are also putting vegetables into river homes for the first time in history, for tending garden is a major club activity.

The clubs also serve as a training ground in democracy. Each year, after two weeks of excited electioneering, members elect their officers by secret ballot. Three of the largest clubs on the Amazon—at Breves, Cametá and Santarém—chose girls as presidents for 1950. A generation ago parents would not have let girls join such clubs.

For her labors, Maria José earns the equivalent of $90 a month—top bracket for the job. Since Brazil finances nine tenths of the health program, the U.S. the other tenth, she knows that $9 of her salary comes from the *nortes*.

The Amazon people, too, know that their new welfare comes from the U.S. At all the six new hospitals and 27 health centers in the Amazon Valley, there are two bronze tablets, one outside, one inside, saying: "This building—the symbol of a Good Neighbor Health Policy—was constructed by the United States of Brazil and the United States of America." Maria José can't remember how many times she has explained these plaques to townsfolk who cannot read them.

But they have even better evidence than plaques. The institute's SESP brings their new babies into the world, checking their health every three months until they start to school. SESP pulls teeth, vaccinates, kills mosquitoes, runs Four-H clubs, builds privies, plants vegetable gardens, teaches mothers what a diaper is and how to fold and pin it. SESP even supplies the safety pins, and supplies dried milk from the U.S.A. when mother's milk fails. Almost all the people in the Amazon—all over Brazil, in fact—who have had anything worse than a stomach-ache in the last seven years can and do thank SESP for getting them over it.

Along with Maria José, the Cametá health-center staff includes a physician, trained nurse, pharmacist, two other visiting nurse's aides, a sanitary guard, and a lab technician—all Brazilians. They are headed by thirty-six-year-old Dr. Duval G. Tinoco, a modern version of the old-style country doctor, who uses a Diesel-driven launch instead of a horse and buggy. Dr. Tinoco, a general practitioner, was sent by SESP to the University of North Carolina to study the control of epidemics and insect-borne diseases, then assigned to clean up the Cametá pesthole. In 1949 his center treated, without charge, 19,727 patients, gave 5,417 injections, and filled 27,340 prescriptions. It treated only 27 cases of malaria—all of them out-of-town patients.

In Ecuador the institute's health and sanitation program spread over three large areas in Brazil, then reached out to embrace other countries. It now operates in 14 republics from Chile and Uruguay in the south to Mexico in the north.

The programs vary, of course, to meet the particular problem of each nation. But the building of sewers and water-supply systems has been a first step everywhere, as has the elimination of the mosquito.

Wherever Health and San—as the Americans call it—goes to work, houses, huts and hovels are sprayed with DDT three times a year; in fact, the practice has produced a new word in the Spanish language, *Deedeeteezación*. Mosquitoes are no longer the health hazard they used to be in Latin America; any that land on walls, floors or ceilings as late as four months after the spraying are finished.

Pest Spots Freed of Malaria

Health and San spraying crews have completely eliminated malaria in such widely separated pest spots as Leogane, in Haiti, where 71 per cent of the people had it; Chimbote, Peru, where one fourth of the population suffered from it, and Breves, on the Amazon, where 95 per cent of the people were its victims.

Each of the particular problems in the republics where the institute program operates has been given the full treatment —the benefit of our own 80 years of public-health experience.

In Paraguay, the problem has been T.B., leprosy and venereal diseases. Some 25,000 patients are treated at five institute health centers each month. One of the two centers in Asunción, in a zone with a population of 40,000, suddenly found that it had on file 96,000 case histories. Investigation revealed that thousands of patients had given the same address—corner of Peru and Pettirossi Streets. That's where the out-of-towners get off the suburban streetcars and busses to go to the health center; knowing that they are supposed to live in the zone where they get treatment, they had all given that address.

In Peru's copper mines, the problem has been silicosis, and American methods of industrial hygiene have been introduced to combat it.

In Bolivia, where the standard problem of intestinal parasites and mosquito-borne malaria has been terribly aggravated by lice-borne typhus—with 70 per cent of the people afflicted—institute staffers last year treated 373,000 cases, vaccinating 100,000 of them.

In all the republics, because the health programs are primarily meant to help people help themselves, preventive medicine and prophylactic work come first. Nevertheless, nearly 100 hospitals have been built, as well as more than 100 health centers and 150 related facilities such as clinics, dispensaries, laboratories, nursing homes and nursing schools.

The total cost of the program? At first, we in the U.S. contributed heavily because of our war needs. Since V-J day, the Latin-American governments have increased their share and we have cut ours. We now give only $1,216,000 a year, in addition to paying $1,586,000 for the salaries and expenses of American personnel. The 14 republics contribute $10,390,000 a year; they have, on top of that, spent more than $15,000,000 in the U.S. for equipment and supplies.

A lot of the American taxpayer money which has gone into the program in its seven-year span has also been spent right at home—for American-made machinery, vaccines and medicines. Some of it has gone into scholarships under which Latin-American doctors, nurses and technicians are trained in the United States to take over when the Americans return home.

All told, the U.S. contribution to Health and San over the years has totaled $71,091,008, or $3.03 per taxpayer. That works out to 38 cents per head per year. Less than the price of two ice-cream sodas. A price not to boggle at for proving that we are good neighbors—and for winning good neighbors in return. THE END

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