

A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER IN LIBYA

by Jim Swanson

(LIBYA 1969-70)

Our mission in Libya was primarily to teach English as a foreign language. My wife and I were sent to a small village on the edge of the Sahara. There she taught English to 5th grade students, and I had the opportunity to teach in one of the few teacher training schools in the country.

The long range goal of the Libyan Ministry of Education was to have its people become proficient in English so that some could go to England and the United States, seek further education, and return to Libya to help their country. This aspiration was defeated in 1969 when Moammar Kadafi lead a successful revolution there and consequently expelled the entire Peace Corps program from Libya.

What we actually accomplished there during our limited time is debatable. The time spent in our village was very personally enlightening. There were good days and not so good days, but overall, a wonderful experience. I remember attempting to teach some of my students "American" football using an old rugby ball. What a disaster! (The rugby ball became a funny soccer ball.)

I had more success when I found an old 4 x 4 piece of wood, and I carved a bat for baseball. This was an easier game to understand and soon we were playing regularly. I noticed a number of children would come and watch our games. I'm not sure whether these spectators came to watch the game or to see what the crazy American was doing next.

We were out of the country on vacation when the revolution took place. When we were allowed back in, the U.S. Embassy directed us to return to our village, say our goodbyes and then leave Libya and return home. It was a sad time to say farewell to our village friends and colleagues knowing full well we would never see each other again. As we left in our taxi to take us to Tripoli, I looked back once more at our village. There in a small field I saw a group of boys, using an old broom handle as a bat, playing baseball. Whether introducing this American sport was my greatest accomplishment in this small Libyan village, I do not know, but it's given me a wonderful memory.