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## Operation Quick Count

Rodolfo F. Concepcion

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# Notes & Comment

## *Operation Quick Count*

Philippine politics took a new twist during the last election following the introduction of a nationwide civic effort to ensure clean and honest polls. Dubbed "Operation Quick Count", this non-profit, non-partisan movement was initiated on August 13, 1961, by the Manila Times Publishing Co., with the support of several civic organizations.<sup>1</sup> Newspaper readers throughout the country caught a first glimpse of the OQC idea through a popular cartooning contest conducted by the Times-Mirror-Taliba newspaper chain on August 8.

The initiators<sup>2</sup> of the movement, which designated itself a "public service", carefully mapped out the plans for setting up a national machinery with branches in the provinces and even on the precinct level to ensure fast and accurate election reports. This cooperative effort, based on the *bayanihan* spirit, was spurred on by observations which the initiators had made in regard to past elections.

National polls in the past were notorious for having suffered unnecessary delays which in turn paved the way for the commission of various forms of fraud. The organizers of the project pointed out that such election malpractices threatened the stability of the Philippine democracy. The distance gaps between the island provinces added to difficulties in obtaining the early transmission of

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these were the Namfrel, Unicrucel, Fida, Fide, Jaycees, Lions, Rotarians.

<sup>2</sup> Members of the OQC national directorate were Benito Prieto, chairman; Attorney Belen Abreu, Helen Z. Benitez, Greg Feliciano, Leon Hontiveros, Ramon V. del Rosario, Attorney Francisco Ortigas, Alejandro R. Roces, Salvador T. Villa and Juan Quesada, national coordinator.

election figures. In the underdeveloped areas, transportation and communication facilities were observed to be inadequate. In fact there were some areas<sup>3</sup> from which returns in the past elections reached the Commission of Elections only after several weeks or even months. But the electoral commission itself lacked sufficient funds and personnel to tackle the gigantic task of gathering and reporting results as fast as humanly possible.

Faced with these election bottlenecks, the organizers who formed themselves into a national body countered with a country-wide network designed to cover some 40,000 precincts. What was actually blueprinted was a massive working body which called for a large budget and thousands of field personnel. The national directorate of this body was broken into four executive committees, namely: operations, finance, public relations and citizens' participation.

The executive committee on operations took charge of organizing OQC branches and units throughout the islands. It worked closely with the national coordinator and some field supervisors throughout the drive. This group also formulated the procedures which were patterned to assure quick and accurate gathering and relay of returns. Such procedures involved a somewhat intricate transportation and communication network, local tabulation and tallying units, etc.

To obtain maximum results, the public relations arm of the project pushed appeals for public support through the national and local mass communication media which included newspapers, radio, TV, etc. Despite this wide publicity, getting the right people for the many OQC jobs and getting these same people interested in a non-partisan citizens' movement were the first big problems of the OQC organizers.

Actually, the preliminary work on OQC was begun as early as April, 1961. Basic researches on communications, organization, operations and public relations were completed long before the OQC teasers appeared in the pages of *The Manila Times*. These researches, statistics and studies—which were supplied by talented individuals and influential groups whom the OQC initiators had approached for aid and guidance—were applied in the shaping of policies, in analyzing and planning the various aspects of OQC. Part of these researches involved the search for civic-minded individuals who would be willing to devote their time, energy and talent to a patriotic cause and who could be tapped for important OQC jobs on the provincial level. *The Manila Times*, as initiator of the movement, mobilized all its agents, correspondents and reporters

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<sup>3</sup> Among these were Palawan, the Mountain Province, Sulu, Lanao.

in gathering lists of civic leaders in all provinces throughout the archipelago. Without these civic leaders knowing it, the OQC organizers looked into their personal, educational, civic, business and political backgrounds. Subjected to particular scrutiny was the political background of these civic leaders. The OQC organizers were making sure that they were not selecting active political partisans—for OQC was first and last a strictly non-partisan movement.

After having been screened both by OQC field coordinators and the National Headquarters staff, these civic leaders were asked to form the OQC organizing committees in their respective provinces. The bases on which these members of the Provincial Organizing Committees were selected were: judgment, executive ability, knowledge of human nature, genuine affection for others, foresight, resourcefulness, qualities of leadership and ability to work with others.

Theoretically, each of these 54 organizing committees had a short-lived life. Its main function was finished as soon as it had elected a Provincial Coordinator and helped him pick out members for his various working committees. As it turned out, however, most of the members of the organizing committees filled up the various posts in the whole OQC provincial team.

Few of those chosen to form the organizing committee shrank from the call to civic duty sounded by Operation Quick Count. Even before anything was written at all about OQC in the papers, those tapped in "pilot" provincial centers in Mindanao readily accepted the challenge of OQC. All they needed to be told was that politics is too important a business to leave to politicians alone. They also realized that canvassing the election returns is very expensive and that no news-gathering or civic organization in our country is in a position to underwrite such a big-budget project by itself.

The choice of the provincial coordinators in all the 54 chapters was both wise and heartening. As set down by the OQC organizers, those elected provincial coordinators were to be all born leaders, energetic, enterprising, men of integrity and non-partisans. After their election by the organizing committees, these provincial coordinators buckled down to the job of naming the chairmen and members of their working committees and then making the rounds of all the towns in their respective provinces to choose other civic leaders for the equally important post of municipal coordinators. The provincial coordinators spent many sleepless nights and went on back-breaking tours of the towns in their areas to ensure a smooth operation.

The executive committee on finance set ₱200,000 as its fund-raising goal to meet the estimated expenses of the movement. Voluntary

contributions given to the OQC fund were used in paying such operational items as long-distance phone calls, wires, radiograms, operational cash assistance to provincial chapters which needed it, salaries of personnel at the national headquarters, food, etc. Not only did the citizenry donate cash and contributions in kind, but also pledged voluntary services and moral support. Prominent people in every community, public officials, local civic organizations and even plain Juan de la Cruz chipped in shares in the local drives in various forms: money, free labor, food, office equipment, transportation facilities, communication equipment, and so forth. Volunteers from all walks of life were properly screened by the provincial and municipal chapters. The manpower resources of the project were drawn from among the professional classes, the youth, the teachers, the farmers, the merchants, etc. These volunteers worked as couriers, canvassers, tabulators, headquarters staff, liaison men, scorers, dispatchers, and so on. They numbered more than 50,000 and were scattered all over the islands. All such volunteers were given blanket insurance protection<sup>4</sup> from hazards or risks which might occur during the doing of their duties, which carried them into even the remotest villages and most isolated areas. Some of the polling places were accessible only by water transportation, by hiking, by horseback, etc.

Operation Quick Count had finally established provincial chapters in 56 provinces. The provincial units in turn organized some 1,400 city and municipal chapters to put bite into the plan of stretching out the project network throughout the width and breadth of the land.

The provincial chapters, it is interesting to note, enjoyed some measure of autonomy. In some cases, even town chapters were allowed a certain degree of independence. The idea of permitting smaller units to enjoy autonomy was based on the belief that the officers at the helm of the local units could reliably handle the job and that faster transmission of poll results could be expected from such autonomy. Financially, too, some chapters were self-sufficient, whereas others badly needed help. In these last cases the national headquarters saw to it that the needs specified were taken care of. One reason for the greater financial need in some cases was the isolation and hence peculiar transmission difficulties in the more remote areas.

These problems were ironed out in a series of overall meetings and conferences among the city, municipal and provincial chapter officials and the staff men. Here each volunteer became acquaint-

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<sup>4</sup> FGU Insurance Group insured each OQC worker for ₱1,000; Phil-Am Insurance added another ₱1,000 for each.

ed with his particular role in the movement's organizational structure, also learned how to use the various OQC forms (especially prepared for the project by a group of professionals), and how to face the problems which he might be expected to encounter in his own community. Two regional conventions for the provincial coordinators, one for Luzon and the other for the Visayas and Mindanao, were held one month before Election Day and covered on the provincial level the same ground as the other meetings. Some local chapters, too, conducted simulated "dry-runs" following these conventions to find and correct flaws in the actual operation. Finally, a general dry-run was conducted throughout the country on Revision Day, November 4.

On November 14, the entire OQC machinery was put to its acid test. As an added incentive to efficiency, some provincial chapters offered rewards to the first of its local units transmitting complete election reports. National and local newspapers continued to boost the morale of the project's fieldmen by photo and press releases. Local radio networks also featured the Operation.

After 6:00 p.m. on November 14 (the time of the closing of the polls) OQC workers in every precinct simultaneously tallied the turnouts as they were properly scored by poll clerks on the tally board. As soon as the counting ended, the canvasser immediately handed his report to a courier. Further transmission of returns involved almost every kind of transportation. Couriers hurried to their control center on foot and on bikes; on motorbikes, carabaos, horses; in *bancas*, *paraws*, *kumpits*, Piper Cubs, buses and jeeps; no one is known to have walked on his hands, but this was almost the only device not employed. Election returns were also coursed through radio "hams", over long-distance telephone, Telecom and private wire systems, by radiophone, radiogram and walkie-talkie units. As soon as the reports were received at the tabulation center of the town chapter, scorers again tallied the accumulated figures on the local tally board there amid ordered confusion—and ever-present coffee and snacks.

All during the evening of November 14, the provincial poll figures trickled into the central tabulation center at the Manila headquarters. Poll figures coming out of the tabulation machines were constantly fed to a battery of radio-TV facilities and newspapers to give newspaper readers and radio-TV audiences up-to-the-minute reports of election developments. By the following morning the election trends were already starting to become defined.

The day after election, OQC figures gave presidential candidate Diosdado Macapagal a margin of some 500,000 votes over re-electionist candidate Carlos P. Garcia. The afternoon newspapers

sensed a Macapagal victory, since by 11:35 a.m., Wednesday, OQC had already tabulated 58% of the total vote. Four years earlier, at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, the day after election, the fastest unofficial tally had tabulated only 13% of the total vote.

On Wednesday night, 24 hours after the close of the polling places, Bohol Congressman Bartolome Cabangbang aired a radio protest against supposedly unreliable and partisan telegraphed OQC figures. OQC National Directorate official Attorney Francisco Ortigas replied over the radio and through the newspapers that the movement was strictly non-partisan, a project of the citizenry at large.

Of the movement, President-elect Macapagal later said: "It marks another milestone in the Philippine democratic way of life." Max Soliven, publisher of *The Evening News*, wrote: "In spite of many delays and distractions... the men and women of Operation Quick Count deserve a vote of commendation, not an investigation as threatened yesterday by Congressman Bartolome Cabangbang (Nacionalista, Bohol). They never pretended their tabulations were official, but could not help the fact that they were also psychological."

RODOLFO F. CONCEPCION

## *The Peace Corps*

The first unit of President Kennedy's Peace Corps, 138 strong, arrived in Manila on October 12, 1961. Busses immediately took them to hastily built barracks at the Boy Scout Jamboree Headquarters in Los Baños, Laguna. Here the group lived and trained for six weeks (a dialect course and acclimatization lectures), after which they were posted on December 3 to the Bikol and the Visayas, where most now act as teacher's aides in barrio public schools.

The main aim of the Peace Corps, be it noted, is to have Americans learn about people in other countries — how they live, what their interests and motivations are. Teaching and other services rendered in any country are incidental. The real hope is that out of this group and other such groups will come well-informed and sympathetic foreign service officers. The idea is, of course, not new, although the scale on which it is being done now is new. It is a good idea and it is succeeding.

The necessary and expected confusion attending the organization and training of the first group was aggravated by several factors. Los Baños is too far (two hours or a little less by car) from Manila for