

THEY DID IT IN IRIGA

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Two years ago, many were wondering why teachers should return to teaching when many of them could earn four or five times as much outside. Still many were talking of enormous black-market profits, back pay, bonuses, and gratuities, and above all, guerrilla benefits. All these things were idle dreams to teachers of Iriga Elementary School, for though many of them were active members of the guerrilla movement, their first love was the school.

In the whole province, theirs was the biggest problem, for nothing was left of six big beautiful buildings except piles of debris, broken cement posts, land mines, bombed craters, buried barbed wire, and dangerous metal scraps. The school population numbering nearly two thousand pupils were housed in bodegas and in ruined buildings that smell of rotten foodstuffs and wastes. If teachers ever dared to stay on under these conditions, it was because they were determined to build their school houses in spite of these difficulties.

With teachers as leaders, the parents and pupils responded to their noble task of constructing twenty-five cottages, each a classroom by itself. From the smallest child of seven to the twenty-eight-year old grade-six boy came the cry, "Let's build them ourselves!" After three weeks of silent but fruitful effort, the "village" (the cottages are arranged like a small village) was made. Considering the materials and labor of parents and children, the project is valued at twenty thousand vic-

tory pesos. In the words of Mr. Joseph Rexroad, formerly principal of West Virginia Elementary School, then a sergeant in the 158 RCT, U. S. Army, the project is "a wonderful job that the teachers of Iriga Elementary School are doing".¹

In his letter sent to the Principal of the school, on September 11, 1945, Mr. Rexroad further said, "My friends and I have learned much by our visits and conversations. We have had our ego deflated, for we have decided that we are not very good teachers. A group of teachers that can give their services in such an efficient way, with small recompense as to finances, and the only reward expected, the well being and advancement of the human race, deserves the highest praise."

Not one of the teachers in this school ever thought that they played a major role in the history of rehabilitating the Philippine school system, for not long afterwards, hundreds of school houses were modelled from the Iriga school "village". At a distance, with the Iriga Mountain as its background, the beautiful village has been the symbol of the noble task which a group of deserving teachers has done in this period of rehabilitation. More than this, it symbolizes what power, what strength, what influence the fifty-six thousand school teachers can have when they work together.

¹ Mr. Rexroad and several educational experts of the 158 RCT visited the school several times from July to October 1945.