



Staff Photo—Charles Jackson  
**'RAZOR'S EDGE'**  
Jim Parham

## EOA Worthwhile, Says Retiring Head

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Vietnam. EOA took a \$400,000 slash in 1968. And there was always the problem of finding enough skilled manpower to do the jobs required in the massive training, counseling and servicing programs.

Despite all this, EOA has racked up some successes and has been considered among the more progressive anti-poverty agencies in the country.

### YEAR AT START

"It took me about a year to start getting the signals and learn what to do" when conflicting policy guides were issued, Parham said. So Parham just did what he thought was best in administrating about 20 pro-

grams ranging from a small (\$10,000) special food distribution program to a large (\$4 million) training and employment set-up.

Twenty-five to 30 parent-child care centers were funded and Atlanta became the first city in the nation to open such a center.

EOA attracted 602 non-paid middle-class volunteer workers to help in the battle against being poor. And EOA initiated its "Find Out" tours of Atlanta's poverty pockets. Some 4,000 persons have taken the tours, that were begun in January, Parham said. He views the tours and the volunteer program as among EOA's more successful ventures.

EOA also embarked on ambitious training programs, but ran into a common bureaucratic ailment, according to Parham.

### PRESSURES

There was always pressure from above, from Congress and elsewhere to make a good record; therefore, there was always pressure to train those who would best fit into a work situation—and not the high risk hard-core impoverished persons who might make the programs look bad on paper.

Despite some of his criticisms, Parham said he believed that EOA has filled a community need and has fared better under the Nixon administration than he had expected. Parham, who will join the staff of the University of Georgia Law and Government Institutes, also said he saw no real threat to the anti-poverty programs in the administration's removal of certain projects from OEO.

"EOA — or OEO — should be an incubator for ideas. I know of no reason that any given program should remain with OEO after its inception," Parham said.

July 16, 1969

# EOA Worthy, Parham Holds

By BILL SHIPP

Before he was to step down Wednesday as executive administrator of Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Thomas M. (Jim) Parham looked back at his 22 months as a local general in the War on Poverty.

"It was like trying to build a sailing ship and sail it around the world while you were building it," he said. Or, "It was like sliding down the razor's edge of life."

The program was hindered by ambiguity in its missions, at times hamstrung by erratic funding and sometimes almost crippled by a lack of necessary skills, Parham said.

But all things considered, Parham said he believes the program has been worth the troubles—and the money. EOA is currently operating on a \$12 million annual budget with a staff of 500 persons. Parham got a salary of \$20,000 a year.

Parham emphasized he didn't want to appear to be leaving EOA with a blast of criticism. "Atlanta will never be the same because of EOA," he says.

But there were some tall problems to try to solve—problems that for the most part will be inherited by his successor, William W. Allison, who was Parham's deputy administrator.

Parham talked about some of those problems:

Policy dispensed by Office of Economic Opportunity headquarters was often vague, contradictory and sometimes non-existent. It took OEO until the fall of 1968 to set down on paper just what its mission was, although OEO came into being more than three years earlier, Parham said.

"We were told on the one hand to cooperate with existing governmental agencies, and, on the other, to work to change those agencies," Parham said. "We found it was a little difficult to develop cooperation with somebody when you're trying to put the needle to him at the same time."

"We were told to spend wisely

and be efficient, and we were told to use indigenous unskilled personnel whenever possible. We were told to plan scientifically and deliberately, but move in fast and take quick decisive action; we were told to advocate strongly for the poor but don't become politically partisan," Parham said.

A big headache was trying to put together a program and implementing it at the same time. "It was like trying to build a sailing ship and sail it around the world while you were building it," he said.

While juggling and trying to reconcile all the contradictions, there was always something else to contend with. "You had to be liberal enough to be accepted in the poor communities, yet conservative enough so that you could work with the Establishment," Parham said. "It was like sliding down the razor's edge of life."

One would think this might be more than enough to stymie any program—especially one so complex and all-encompassing as the anti-poverty program.

But these weren't the only troubles. Congress slashed the budget for helping the poor in the United States so that the country could finance the war in

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