

Campfire Yarn 9 -- The Patrol Method

From the Handbook for Scoutmasters by William "Green Bar Bill" Hillcourt, 1936. This is the first formal presentation of the Patrol Method to Scoutmasters.

"The Patrol Method is not ONE method in which Scouting can be carried on. It is the ONLY method!"

--Roland Philipps

Take any thirty boys, turn them loose in a closed street, a playground, or a sports field—and you know what happens.

Shortly something will be under way. A clatter of many eager voices raised in discussion—and out of the large group will evolve a number of smaller groups, in gangs, ready for game or mischief.

Such are boys. The impulse of forming gangs is natural to them. They cannot help themselves.

What Constitutes a "Gang"?

In its simplest form the gang is merely a group of boys who habitually play together after school or after work. Accidents of various sorts—age, neighborhood, similarity of interest—bring together a somewhat random group. Immediately the boys react on one another. One or more leaders come to the fore. They take their positions naturally, with little form or ceremony.

The gang organizes itself, finds or makes its meeting place, begins to do things. Usually it has some particular objective in which it is interested, such as baseball, football, going on trips, or—in bad gangs—stealing. Gang spirit is strengthened by this common pursuit and gang honor and gang loyalty thrive. The gang develops a collective mind, and sets forth as a unit to carry out schemes and activities which would hardly so much as enter the head of one boy alone.

The gang is, in short, a little social organism, with a life of its own, reaching beyond the sum of the lives of its several members.

The Gang Becomes the Patrol

This gang, this natural unit of boys for boy activities, is the all-important unit in Scouting. It changes its name, it is true, from gang to Patrol, but it is a "gang" just the same, *a small, permanent group of boys allied by similar interests, working together under the responsible leadership of one of its number—the Patrol Leader.*



Figure 1 Here is a "natural gang" hang out. This Scout has something the gang wants. Adventure, out of doors. They'll be in his Patrol soon.

However, the Scout Patrol is far more than the casual gang of the street corner, the fly-by-night, strong one day, gone the next. It is made permanent and effective through the guidance of an understanding adult. Its activities are laid out according to a plan, full of variety and boy-interest. It is strengthened through adherence to a man-made but boy-accepted code of honor. It is stimulated through association with other similar groups. And yet, throughout, it is fundamentally a boys' gang.

One, two, three, four, or even five Patrols, each under its own

boy leader, form the Troop. The Patrols are the working units in Scouting, while the Troop organization provides supervision and coordination, and establishes loyalty and opportunities for service.

In other words, a Troop is *not* divided into Patrols. *A Troop is the sum total of its Patrols.*

The strength of the Boy Scout Program is its ability to satisfy the boy's own wants and at the same time to direct those wants into social channels. The strength of its organization is its fidelity to the boy's own way of organizing. But the reason for our using the Patrol Method in Scouting is not alone because it fits in with the boy's nature and his desires. The remarkable thing is that it fits equally well with the adult leader's aims and purposes.

Developing Leadership

In our Movement's objective of character training for good citizenship we emphasize not only the development of men of good character, but of leaders of men. It is by using the Patrol Method that we may succeed in this.

The only way to develop leadership in a boy is to give him a chance to practice it. The Patrol method provides this practice by placing upon the boys themselves the responsibility of running their own gangs, of making them—or breaking them. It gives the boys the opportunity to lead. It brings forward boys of decided leadership abilities and awakens in others their latent powers. It gives to all of them their chance.

The Patrol—"A Happy Family!"

But also, the Patrol Method offers to the boys an opportunity to *live*.

The way a Patrol is formed, according to the boys' own interests and desires, their own likes, makes for a congenial unit—a "happy family." In the family the bond of blood unites its members. In the Patrol, the bond which unites the boys—often of different social standing, different environment, rich and poor—is their common share in the game of Scouting.

The fascination of the life in the good Patrol unconsciously creates in its members a strong feeling of loyalty and affection, of obedience to a common cause, and the spirit of "give and take" so necessary in life, with those with best brains, the strongest, the most fortunate, giving a helping hand to the others less gifted. Quite naturally, if this feeling and this spirit are properly fostered, through the wise leadership of an understanding Scoutmaster they will in some way expand and will show themselves in the relations of the boy with his parents, his school, his church, and later on, in his life as a full-grown citizen.

In the Patrol, gang spirit—Patrol Spirit—nourished and encouraged to grow, will be steadily at work and will produce a whole-hearted participation of all its members. Patrol honor will expand into an active living of the Scout Oath and Law. Patrol projects, such as a hike, the making of camp equipment, a pioneering stunt, will create enthusiasm for the undertaking of other feats, for growth and further accomplishments.

Thus the real Patrol provides from within itself the incentive which will spur its members on to advancement.

Making the Scoutmaster More Effective

Another feature of the Patrol Method is that it simplifies the work of the adult leader and makes it possible for him to be more effective.

The minute the Scoutmaster realizes a Scoutmaster's job is not to run His Troop but to train boy leaders to run THEIR Troop he will be relieving himself of much trivial work and reducing the demands on his own time and will be approaching more nearly the aims of Scouting.

The Scoutmaster who skillfully utilizes trained Patrol Leaders is not tied down to the details of first aid and signaling instruction, the worry over dues and attendance, and so on. He has time free to study, to formulate ideas, to keep the Troop progressively advancing, and above all to make his influence toward high character more effective through frequent personal contacts with individual boys.

A Scoutmaster gets to know his Scouts better by watching them react to the leadership of others. As an observer he can tell better how to give each boy the sort of personal counsel and friendly guidance he particularly needs

Insuring the Permanency of the Troop

The Patrol Method also helps to insure the permanency of the Troop. The existence of a Troop that does not use the Patrol Method is often absolutely dependent on the continuing activity of the Scoutmaster. When Patrol Leaders are well trained in the responsibility of leadership, they will keep their Patrols active and thus preserve the life of the Troop even after a Scoutmaster is rendered temporarily inactive or finds it necessary to resign.

The Main Object of the Patrol Method

We must keep constantly in mind, though, that "The object of the Patrol Method"—as Baden-Powell says—is not so much to save trouble for the Scoutmaster, as to give responsibility to the boy—since this is the very best of all means of developing character. The Scoutmaster gives the aim, and the several Patrols vie with each other in attaining it, thus automatically raising their standards of keenness and efficiency all round."

How Do We Recognize the Patrol Method

Naturally, the results claimed for the Patrol Method are not obtained unless the Troop is truly run according to its precepts.

How then may we recognize a Troop which truly uses the Patrol Method?

Let us investigate—let the curtain rise on three Troops of three different types of organization and administration. There may be other types, but these will be sufficient to illustrate the point.

Troop No. 1 prides itself on its Merit Badge Scouts. The Scoutmaster is a biologist and his hobby is cramming facts into young minds. He fills their heads with technical information, such as the symptoms of apoplexy and sunstroke, the difference between scarlet oak and red oak and recipes for hunter's stew, and the badge-covered Scouts miss the essential point of advancement—"Learning by Doing." The Scoutmaster conducts his Troop as one large class. Its hikes and camps, are outdoor class sessions. The Patrols exist only as sub-divisions on the Troop records. "Patrol Leader" is merely an honorary title. Since all imagination, all initiative, all responsibility, are thus restricted to the Scoutmaster, the Troop, when free from his control, generally degenerates into a disorganized mob.

Troop No. 2, whose Scoutmaster has had military training, is the banner Troop for exhibitions, drills, and parades. During the Troop meeting the proverbial pin

drop can be heard. The hikes are marches, the camps exercises in tent pitching. The Scouts drill like clockwork. They are efficient in bandaging, signaling and other Scouting practices. Patrols are kept to full size of eight by being penalized when there are gaps in the ranks at drills. The Scoutmaster plans all programs, conducts all meetings, issues all instructions, and gives all orders. In fact, the Scoutmaster makes all decisions requiring initiative or responsibility. The only thing he delegates to his Patrol Leaders is the enforcement of discipline; his boy leaders are not allowed to exercise responsibility. The Troop is the dominant factor. The Patrols have no more individuality than the squads in a company of infantry.

Troop No. 3 has its share of Merit Badge Scouts and streamers testifying to its proficiency at Council Rallies and Camporees. Yet, its Scoutmaster is never much in evidence. He keeps himself in the background and offers only such stimulus, guidance and is necessary for the best development of Patrol efficiency and Troop spirit. The meetings of the Troop are planned and executed by the boys themselves through their chosen boy leaders. Always one Patrol or another has a surprise to spring on the others, such as a stunt, a game, a contest. There are never any problems of discipline, because the discipline comes from within each boy and is not stamped upon him from without. Advancement is steady because the boys of their own desire are actually practicing Scoutcraft, not only at Troop meetings and occasional Troop hikes, but at numerous individual Patrol meetings and hikes in which no adults take part. Each Patrol does its own thinking and can be trusted to carry a job through to the end under its own leadership.

The Test of the Patrol Method

An old experienced Scoutmaster said once: "The test of the Patrol Method is in the easy chair!"

His audience looked nonplused, so he elaborated his statement: "Get an easy chair and place it in a corner of the Troop meeting room. If you can sink into it just after the opening ceremony and just sit throughout the meeting, without a worry for its success, without lifting a finger or moving a foot until time comes for the closing-well, then your Troop is run on the Patrol Method-your boy leaders are actually leading."

That, figuratively, is the test-as exemplified by Troop No. 3 above and indicates the condition toward which you should aim for the future of your Troop. For unless a Troop makes use of the Patrol Method it cannot be considered a Scout Troop, since "the Patrol Method is not ONE method in which Scouting can be carried on. It is the ONLY method."

And the two-fold secret of success is simple:

- I. Make the Patrol the unit ALWAYS, in and out through thick and thin, for better and worse in victory and defeat, in games and on hikes, and in camp.
- II. Train your boy leaders for their positions, place the responsibility of leadership on them and let them exercise it.

Only as a Scoutmaster acts on this principle does he understand—and use—the Patrol Method.

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