THE PATROL SYSTEM

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THE PATROL SYSTEM

It is necessary to point out at the start that the Patrol System is not one method in which Scouting for boys can be carried out, but that it is the only method.

Let us get clear from the outset what the Patrol System is. It is a method of training in leadership and in discipline by which boys are put into permanent teams under their own leaders.

It is a system of learning by doing. The P.L.s learn leadership through the real responsibility and power that are placed upon them. The Scouts learn discipline from the fact that the majority of the orders they have to obey come from boys who are only slightly older and stronger than themselves. In other words, they have to recognise orders as orders.

The Patrol System has in addition a number of byproducts. It can show democratic principles working in practice, through the functions of the Court of Honour. It can teach boys how to make their own pleasures and interests without being spoon-fed or cajoled, and it can demonstrate that traditions and standards, both good and bad, grow up even in a very small community.

The Patrol System is not merely a method of organising a Troop. (As such it is often strikingly inefficient). It is not a handy method of collecting subscriptions, or of falling in on parade, or of having permanent relay teams. But it is an ingenious and lively way of getting boys to face up to questions of team-work, responsibility, organisation, obedience, punishment and unselfishness.

It is the envy of other organisations. It is the product of one of the fundamental ideas that B.-P. introduced in the first days of Scouting, for he wrote in the introduction to the first Edition of Scouting for Boys, "In all cases I would strongly commend the Patrol System, that is, small permanent groups, each under responsible charge of a leading boy, as a great step to success". We would be fools to ignore it, or to be content to use it in half measures. If we are to run Scouting at all, we must run the Patrol System.

There is also the other side to the picture. It is far easier to write about the Patrol System that it is to run it in practice. And its full advantages cannot be achieved in a day.

THE DETAILED PICTURE

Look at a Troop that has been running the Patrol System for some time. It could show that: –

1. The greatest possible number of its activities are carried out on a Patrol basis.
2. The majority of its P.L.s are respected by Scouts in the Troop, and are generally able to get their orders obeyed.
3. Its Scouts usually voice plans and complaints to their P. L's. in the first instance.
4. The Court of Honour meets regularly, and has a definite influence on Troop plans and policy. As a disciplinary body it is held in awe by most of the Scouts.
5. At least some of the Patrols hold their own Patrol meetings.

HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

All this may seem a long way removed from the position in your own Troop, where the P.L.s are perhaps quite unwilling or incapable of taking responsibility and arc possibly held in anything but respect by their Scouts. But the first essential to grasp over this Patrol System business is that it

takes time to grow. It can never be achieved in one fell swoop. It is not a matter of making a single decision, putting it into action and seeing immediate results, but one of gradual growth. It is a process of pushing and leading the P. L.s forward; of building up the Court of Honour; and of teaching oneself to step back from the limelight.

It will take time – perhaps three years – whilst a whole generation of Scouts becomes accustomed first to being led by P.L.s who are almost their contemporaries, and then to being leaders themselves with the same precarious authority.

SMALL BEGINNINGS

So, on the principle of beginning small and looking wide, compare your own Troop with the one described in page 3 and see where you can start.

1. ACTIVITIES BY PATROLS

The Patrol is a unit for purposes of work, games, discipline, camp, and good turns. And it must be left to function as a unit with its own Leader and Second. If you, as a Scouter, continually allow yourself to act as a Patrol Leader or if you continually form composite teams for games and activities, the result may appear more efficient, but endless chances of training the boys in leadership and discipline will have been missed. After all, the principal object of running a Scout Troop is to train boys, and not to form an efficient army-like unit, with yourself as platoon commander learning all the lessons.

At Troop meetings have as many inter-Patrol activities and games as possible. Continually pit the Patrols against each other, and run a permanent inter-Patrol competition to build up team spirit and, within reason, rivalry. Apart from that, it is a matter of getting your own attitude right, of taking it for granted, for example, that Patrols will work together as teams, that the Bulldogs will not let each other down, that the Lions have a tradition of being good at knotting, whilst the Eagles seldom lose a relay race. The odd word of praise and the hint of pained surprise will be your means of boosting the Patrol System rather than any formal announcements or solemn running-up of the Patrol System flag, as it were.

About games, Roland Philipps had this to say: *Scouting itself may be described as "the grandest of all games". It must be remembered, however, that whether it is a big game or a small game,*

whether it is an indoor game or an outdoor game, whether it is a contest of muscles or a contest of wits, the essential thing is that the Patrol should form the unit, and that nobody should be a spectator.

Mid-week activities by Patrols are a practical proposition. At a Troop Meeting occasionally set a project to each P.L. for his Patrol to accomplish in the week, and judge results at the next meeting. An involved Scavenging Hunt, or a form of Gallup Poll are possible examples of the type of project to use. The more you can get Patrols to meet outside Scouting hours, the more likely they are to teach each other something valuable.

At camp, again keep Patrols together. Even with Troop cooking there are many opportunities for them to work as individual units, but it will be Patrol cooking that will be the real make-or-break test. Some Patrols will make the grade and weld themselves even closer together, whilst others will relapse into a complaining, grasping mob. All will learn.

Patrol camps are an ideal method of building up team spirit, and of putting real responsibility on the P.L. Mistakes will redound immediately on the offender's head, with no Scouter nearby to put things right. They will be on their own with no apron strings and will learn more of life in a week-end than they would at a Troop camp in a fortnight.

Within reason do not interfere with their plans for camp. Let them learn by making mistakes. I have a vivid recollection of standing by and making myself do nothing whilst a Patrol were loading up all their camp kit except the tent poles.

Incidentally, do not forget to make sure that parents realise that only a P.L. will be in charge, and in any event only allow experienced campers to go.

When a Patrol has succeeded in building itself up into a reasonably effective unit, there is another activity which you must suggest to it, and that is service to others. A Troop can be proud if even one of its Patrols has realised that it is in a position to answer calls which are being made up to it, and is doing its best to answer them. The job of the Scouter is to make

his Scouts see the truth in the unpopular saying, "Life is all give and take", and then to encourage them to start thinking about giving. It is a difficult job, as the usual reaction is either "Why me?" or "How much do we get paid?" But make suggestions, engineer openings, and give facilities.

Service is a vital part of our training, and service by Scouts in their Patrols is a very fine and rare way of expressing it. Roland Philipps went so far as to say: – *There is no reason why every good Patrol in the Movement should not be doing some continuous good turn.*

2. RESPECT FOR P.L.s

It is essential that P.L.s should be regarded by their Scouters and by their Scouts as people of importance. So do not miss an opportunity of showing the Troop that you really place reliance on your P.L.s' position and opinions. Get into the habit of refusing to make decisions and plans until you have consulted them, and so let the Troop know that you dislike taking any important step without first finding out the P.L.s' views.

Make sure that your P.L.s have the first chance of taking advantage of any privileges or special treats that may be going. *In giving privileges one is confering authority.*

Never criticise or deflate a P.L. in public.

The Scoutmaster should never give orders to his Scouts except through his Patrol Leaders. Those who say that this does not work have not tried it. One of the surest ways of increasing the prestige of a Leader is to see that he knows of future plans and changes before the men he has to lead. The sight of a P.L. surrounded by his Patrol eagerly questioning him about something which he knows and they do not, is a sure sign that he is being looked to as their leader. When organising games for the Troop, therefore, explain details to the P.L.s first and let them in turn pass them on to their Scouts. To begin with you may have to run over the chief points again yourself, but that does not matter. The P.L.s will have had their moment.

Similarly, always divulge news of forthcoming camps and events to the Court of Honour before you mention them to individual Scouts. Great harm has been done to a P.L.'s prestige if any of his Scouts can say to him, "You don't know nothing".

The question of training P.L.s in leadership is dealt with below, but one point should be mentioned now. At an early stage teach them how to get obedience from their Patrols. Explain, for example, that an order to "Fall In", shouted haphazardly at a milling throng of Scouts is as unlikely to succeed as a whispered request – the ringleader must be fastened upon and subdued before the others will follow. Impress on your P.L.s the importance of getting their Scouts into the

habit of obedience. Tell them to pounce at an early stage on the disobedient and to bring him up before you for a rebuke or before the Court of Honour for more elaborate treatment.

The P.L.s' technical knowledge is also of paramount importance. Unless he is at least a step ahead of his Scouts, he cannot hope to be able to impress them. Worse still, there is a danger that he may even be a step behind them if he has to spend too much time in instructing others. So he must have separate training sessions, a P.L.s' week-end training camp (probably at Easter) and facilities for borrowing technical books. The District may also be able to help by running P.L.s' Parliaments and other functions. *To work the Patrol System at all successfully it is necessary to give to Patrol Leaders and Seconds greater ideas and greater knowledge than the boys whom they are expected to command.*

In short, you must first convince yourself that your P.L.s are important cogs in the wheel, and then you must do everything in your power to convince them and the Troop of the same thing. For if you think little of them, or if they have no confidence in themselves, it is quite certain that they will stand even lower in the opinion of the Scouts.

3. THE P.L. AS A LINK IN THE CHAIN

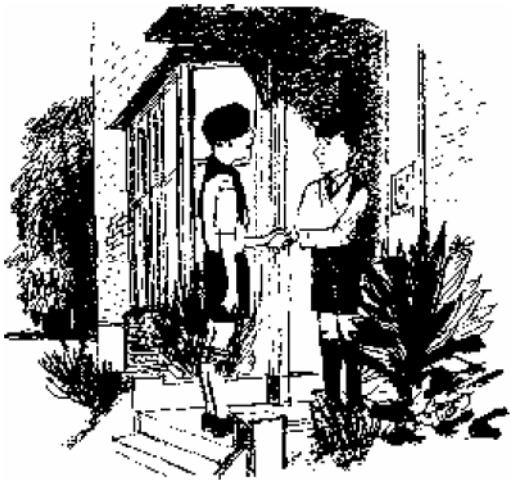
It is very easy to get into the habit of dealing direct with the Scouts instead of through the P.L.s, but very short-sighted. If you do not insist on the Scouts always mentioning their complaints or proposals to their P.L. in the first place, you will have missed a good opportunity of increasing the P.L.s' prestige in the eyes of their Scouts, and also, incidentally, of saving yourself a bit of work. Get accustomed to saying to the, "Skip, why-don't-we?" type, "What does your P.L. think?", or "Ask your P.L. to bring it up at the Court of Honour." In that way, two birds are killed with one stone: the Scout is reminded that his P.L. is his immediate boss and must not be overlooked, and the P.L. is given the responsibility of putting forward a point of view that may not be his own.

Another way of stressing the P.L.s' importance is for it to be the rule for him to visit the home of any absentee Soout to enquire the reason for his non-attendance. If the same Scout persists in staying away it is of course your job to follow him up, but on the first occasions a visit from the P.L. often shakes both the Scout and his parents.

In training, the part your P.L.s play should be an important one but it will vary widely in individual cases. It should not be difficult to see that each P.L. always takes his recruits through their Tenderfoot. By doing so he will automatically put himself into the right perspective as the knowledgeable boss.

But subsequent training will be more difficult. Some P.L.s' knowledge may be too shaky for them to be effective as teachers in the more advanced subjects. Some will find it impossible to hold the attention of older boys, and some will be so bound up in their own progress or idleness as to be disinclined to do anything at all.

But expect from each just a little more than he thinks he can give, make sure he really knows what he is teaching (a run-through with you as the pupil is an effective way of testing him) and impress on him that this job is one of real service and a big part of his responsibilities.



It is important that your P.L,s should have an opportunity of keeping up with their own progress despite the fact that some of their time will be spent in training others. Many Troops arrange for them to stay behind after the meeting for this purpose, others give them a separate evening. Perhaps the best opportunity to take is at a meeting of the Court of Honour. Alternatively, use can be made of the Patrol Leaders Training Courses which are being run more and more widely throughout the country.

Whatever method you choose will mean extra work for the Scouters, but it will repay you in giving added prestige to the P.L.s and will enable them to do a job and learn something of the art of teaching which they would otherwise miss entirely.

It is important also that the Patrol Leader's position should be looked upon by himself and by his Scoutmaster as his school of training for ultimate Scoutmastership.

4. THE COURT OF HONOUR

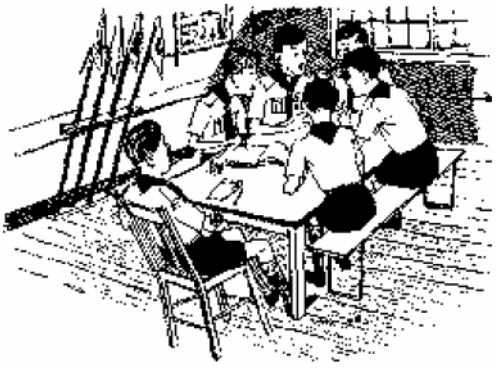
Here is a real opportunity for showing your P.L.s what responsibility means: for giving them a working view of that ubiquitous method of organisation – the committee; and for letting the Scouts see that the Troop is not run by you alone. Another more subtle lesson the Court of Honour teaches is that standards of conduct can be made to grow up amongst a group of people as well as be imposed upon them by some higher authority, that people can make rules for themselves as well as have rules thrust upon them. When evasion of the law and the attitude of "Well, no-one said we couldn't . . ." are so widespread, this is a rare and precious piece of knowledge.

Finally, the Court of Honour teaches boys how to make decisions (especially if you frequently sit back and say, "It's up to you") and that all decisions have results for good or bad. Do not hesitate to make a habit of pointing out the consequences that have, resulted from their previous decisions.

As a booklet has been written in *The Scouter's Books* dealing solely with the Court of Honour, it is not proposed to write much about its working details here. But the following points cannot be stressed too often.

The Court of Honour must meet regularly – at least once a quarter, preferably once a month. If it does not, you will find yourself making decisions that ought to be left to it.

It must really decide things. As often as you can, give the P.L.s an entirely free hand, and when they are more or less on the right lines, do not even give advice They will make mistakes, but they can learn from them. A gentle "I told you so", will do them a world of good.



At other times you will have to influence and veto, but explain why. *If it is understood that the Scoutmaster holds a final veto over the decision the Court makes, it is almost certain that he will never have to use it.*

Again at times you will be merely keeping them informed of some decision that has already been taken. When this is so explain what you are doing and why they have not been asked to make a decision themselves.

Stress the point that Court of Honour proceedings are secret. This in itself will have the effect of increasing their importance.

Do not act as Chairman yourself, but see that one is properly elected, and then sit next to him or slightly behind him so that you can nudge and prompt without disturbing the meeting and so that other members will also be looking in his direction when they speak directly to you – as they will.

Follow formal meeting procedure, especially in the reading of minutes, the appointment of chairman and secretary and the necessity for speaking through the chairman. It may be years before they have another chance of seeing a committee in action.

The greatest advantage of the Court of Honour is that, more than anything else, it encourages the Patrol System and fosters the Patrol spirit. Every Leader is told that he is responsible for his Patrol, but he never feels this responsibility more clearly than he does at the meeting of the Court of Honour.

Frequently impress upon P.L.s that they are there as representatives of their Scouts and consequently must make it their job to find out and put across other people's views, even though they may not agree with them. To make sure they do in fact collect their Patrols' views before a meeting of the Court of Honour, give them ample opportunity for doing so at Patrol Comers, or a meeting of the Patrol in Council. For this purpose the P.L.s should have advance information of the important points that are to be discussed.

Try to teach the difficult lesson that a majority decision must be accepted by the minority as wholeheartedly as if it were unanimous.

The Court of Honour is a good opportunity to remind P.L.s of their responsibility for each individual Scout in their Patrol by asking them in turn to report on their Scouts (particularly on their progress), and then throwing the meeting open for questions either from other P.L.s or the S.M. Roland Philipps gives a good example of this:

The P.L. may be asked, for instance, why he has got a Scout wearing a Service Star who has not yet earned any Proficiency Badges, or he may be asked whether Tom Smith, who yesterday broke his arm, is at home or in hospital and, if in hospital, what are the visiting days.

When the Court of Honour is dealing with a disciplinary matter as part of its job of "guarding the honour of the Troop", make sure it acts with as much solemnity as possible. The following procedure is probably the best.

In the presence of the offender, the case should be outlined by the chairman, or yourself, or whoever has brought the Scout before the Court of Honour. The Scout should then be given an opportunity of stating his case and even, if really necessary, of producing witnesses. Then he should be asked to retire whilst his case is discussed. Finally he must be recalled and given another opportunity of speaking his mind both before and after he has been told of the verdict and sentence. To avoid the difficulty of a Scout refusing to come before the Court of Honour and so producing a deadlock which may result in losing him from the Troop, it is often a good idea to hold emergency meetings to deal on the spot with breaches of discipline. This is particularly effective after a Troop Meeting or at camp. It impresses everyone with the speed with which Justice can strike at offenders, and has a correspondingly good effect on discipline.

Unselfishness, loyalty, responsibility and a grounding in committee procedure can all be taught through the Court of Honour. It is amazing that some Groups try to get along without one at all.

5. PATROL MEETINGS

An ultimate achievement of the Patrol System is for Patrols to hold their own regular meetings and activities. There is much to be done before this can be realised but also much to be learnt on the way. The only method is to start on a small scale and not to hope for too much at first.

Work in Patrol Corners at a Troop Meeting can be the most valueless part of the evening's work. A typical session of Patrol Corners consists all too often of the P.L. patiently teaching a Tenderfoot his knots, the Second and another Scout struggling rather half-heartedly with a First Class subject, while the remainder are in varying degrees of apathy or hostility. But put yourself in the P.L's shoes. How would you like to cope simultaneously with six boys all at different stages of progress and all in varying states of enthusiasm? So lighten their burden by looking after the troublemakers yourself and leaving the P.L.s only as many Scouts as they can manage.

The decoration of Patrol Corners either permanently or by means of removable screens can certainly succeed in building up a Patrol spirit in some Patrols. It can also waste a lot of time if done during Troop meetings. There is a leaflet on the subject in *The Patrol Book,* which is worth reading.

'Patrols in Council' is a pompous term for a brief informal meeting of a Patrol when it is making a plan, or discussing something that is to be brought up at the next Court of Honour. Ideally they will meet separately for this purpose but generally it is best to set aside a part of the Troop Meeting.

It will assist the P.L.s if you give them a brief note of anything in particular that you want them to decide. It is surprising how heatedly boys can discuss a subject without eventually emerging with an answer. As one or two Patrols are bound to finish early, have something ready to save them disturbing the others.

And so, by encouraging Patrols to get together and work together under your eye, you can lead them on to their own separate Patrol Meeting which should ideally be held in their own den. Some Patrols will come quite easily to this stage, others will never achieve it. Your job is to give them the idea, to suggest places to meet and things to do, but to keep away unless invited. Do not despair if the majority of your Patrols never meet together outside Troop night nor if only half the Patrol turns up to the so-called Patrol Meeting: enough will be learnt even from small achievements and you can comfort yourself by remembering that if you fail you are with the majority. The main thing is to keep on trying.

LONG-TERM POLICY

Your long-term policy is the next thing to decide. Let us consider it under the following headings: –

1. PLACING BOYS IN PATROLS

The importance of getting the right boys in the right Patrols cannot be over-stressed. All too often the latest recruit is simply put into the smallest Patrol, without any attention being paid as to whether he is likely to fit into it, or whether his real friends already in the Troop are in other Patrols. Unevenness in the size of your Patrols is far less important than having Patrols that really work together and have a communal spirit.

Much is written about the way in which the Patrol System takes advantage of the boys' natural gang spirit, but it is important to get quite clear about this. If you put into one Patrol a collection of ill-assorted boys of varying ages and diverse interests and backgrounds, it is unlikely that anything, even the Patrol System, will mould them into a gang. On the other hand the Patrol System will most certainly infuse new strength and purpose into an already existing gang, and it is in that way that you should use the gang spirit. Build from existing ties and affinities instead of trying to create them.

Remembering this, always ask a new recruit who it was that gave him the idea of joining the Troop. Find out, from Scouts who go to the same school, who his friends are and what are his interests. Fit him in accordingly. In any case, and particularly in the instance of a dark horse, impress on him that his first Patrol is only a temporary one and that he is to tell you if he would rather be in another.

If your Group has a large Cub Pack it will certainly be worth considering whether you could arrange things so that as a general rule Cubs and recruits of Cub age are only allowed into the Troop at certain times, (say twice a year), and that they are put into the same Patrol under an older P.L. and Second. Any disadvantage such a young Patrol may have in games

and competitions is often over-estimated and in any event is soon outgrown. On the other hand, as its members will be roughly of the same age and as some will have been friends in the Cubs, it will certainly have the nucleus of a powerful gang spirit. Older recruits can be fitted at any time of the year into whichever Patrol is most likely to accept them readily.

If this system is followed for a number of years at least some of the Patrols are likely to develop a healthy gang spirit which can easily be missed altogether under the more conventional methods.

Sometimes the whole of an existing gang may present itself and ask to be allowed to join. Naturally you will not think of splitting them up, but on the other hand do not assume that they, or in fact any of your carefully planned Patrols, will eternally remain bosom friends. Gangs change. Close friends become sworn enemies overnight and all your plans are upset.

Any application from a Scout to be transferred from one Patrol to another should be treated seriously and be dealt with by the Court of Honour. Flippant requests for transfer frequently arise at camp on the most flimsy grounds ("I had to do the washing-up twice running") and more often than not should be ignored or you will soon have the whole Troop shuffling and re-shuffling themselves. But be on the look-out for the genuinely mis-placed boy, who cannot get on with his P.L. or the fellow-members of his Patrol, or who is continually spending his time with another Patrol. A quick transfer for him may save him from leaving.

2. CHOICE OF PATROL LEADERS AND SECONDS

Nine times out of ten the obvious choice for the next P.L. of a Patrol stands out head and shoulders above the rest but if the need to choose does arise do not necessarily pick the boy who has the longest service or the most badges. Go for the leader even if it means a difficult interview with the boys you have had to pass over, and perhaps an even more difficult one with their parents. Watch to see who the others respect and who they shout down or ignore.

Imagine the Patrol in camp on a rainy morning and no fires lit. Who will be out and about first and chivying the others? Choose him.

I entirely agree with what Roland Philipps has to say on the subject of age: *If a boy is to be appointed Patrol Leader it is important that his age should not be against him. This does not signify that a boy of twelve cannot be just as successful as a leader as a boy of sixteen or eighteen, but it means that a boy unless quite exceptional, is unable to lead other boys older than himself. Young boys follow an older one even if he is stupid. Old boys do not follow a younger one, even if he is clever. In this respect muscles usually have a more cogent influence than brains. Boys have a respect for biceps without being interested in phrenology.*

One other vital factor must be taken into account when choosing a P.L. and that is his attitude to Duty to God. If you have a bunch of P.L.s who obviously attach little importance to religion, you will have the utmost difficulty in achieving anything in that direction with the Troop as a whole. If on the other hand your P.L.s are for the most part dutiful, and chaps who would not hesitate to defend their beliefs when necessary, then you will find that, with guidance, they will cut far more ice with their Scouts than you ever will.

The final decision is yours. Never forget that. You can take the advice of the Court of Honour, you can ask the opinion of the Patrol (often a good thing to do) but ultimately you must decide. The P.L. chooses his Second but you choose the P.L.

The Second is a boy selected by the Patrol Leader to be his assistant and to take charge of the Patrol when he himself is away. It is essential to the successful organisation of the Patrol that the leader and Second should be on terms of intimate co-operation. It is for this reason that a Scoutmaster who chooses the Patrol Seconds without consultation with the Leaders is making an initial mistake, which it may be impossible afterwards to rectify. A Scoutmaster will certainly talk over with his Leader the question of who the Second is to be, but unless he can convince his Leader by argument, he must not use his powers as a Scoutmaster to appoint a Second against the Leader's wishes. The Founder of the Movement was in favour of leaving the selection of the Second entirely in the hands of the Patrol Leader, and of letting him make his own mistakes if he wants to.

3. TRAINING OF P.L.s IN LEADERSHIP

It is the principal work of every Scoutmaster in the movement to see that his Patrol Leaders are able to lead their Patrols.

On being appointed a P.L. the Scout is meeting, probably for the first time in his life, the responsibilities and difficulties of being a leader without having any experience or teaching to draw on. So do not expect him to make a success of it on his own. Teach him the rudiments of leadership in a preliminary chat, either alone or at the Court of Honour (where the others can chip in with their own bitter experiences), and then keep an eye on him for the first month or two and particularly at his first camp, to see how he shapes.

Tell him, for example, that a request to a Scout to do something is more likely to succeed than an order, but that orders when given, must always and without exception be obeyed. Nothing is more destructive of discipline in a Troop than to hear a P.L. giving a series of orders which no-one, least of all himself, has any intention of seeing obeyed. Assure him that if he gets a case of disobedience to a clear order, and if he brings the offender to you either personally or through an immediate Court of Honour, you will deal with him. Give him the tip that it is better to say to a Scout, "Come and help me do this", and then fade away when he has got started on the job, than to say "Go and do that". Explain the fundamental principle of leadership that a leader never tells any of his men to do anything which he would not be prepared to do himself. And point out that his own standards of conduct must be twice as high as that of his Scouts because consciously and unconsciously they will mould their standards on his, and if his are low theirs will be lower still.

Continually drum these points home to your P.L.s in private, of course, and not in front of Scouts. They may resent your advice and think they know twice as much as you about the problem, but do not let that stop you handing it out. Above all they must know that you are behind them in this matter of discipline and that you will show no mercy to deliberate offenders.

4. THE SECONDS

The Second is a person who must not be neglected. He has been chosen, as you will remember, not by you but by his P.L. So he is not necessarily a future P.L. himself – a point that must be made clear to him from the start. Nevertheless he must be trained with that possibility in mind. Absolute loyalty to his P.L. is the chief demand that will be made of him and which he must learn to give. In return he must be treated as a person of importance in the Troop, who can be trusted to take charge when his P.L. is away, and who, like his P.L., is entitled to be singled out for any extra privileges that may be going.

In many Troops, especially small ones, certain Seconds are elected to the Court of Honour. This custom has much to commend it, but there is a danger of it becoming invidious and giving rise to jealousies.

5. COMPETITIONS

Competitions have already been mentioned as a means of building up a Patrol spirit. They are certainly worth trying, if only from time to time. The following hints may be worth knowing: (i) A competition of short duration is much more likely to succeed than one that drags on for months. A month is usually quite long enough.

(ii) If you wish to lighten up on any particular part of Troop life, weight the scales accordingly. For example, absenteeism may be getting out of hand. So organise the competition in such a way that any Patrol is heavily penalised which has a Scout absent from a meeting without good reason. When that Patrol accordingly comes bottom in the competition, point out the reason and leave the rest in their hands. It is wonderful to see the amount of wrathful indignation that can be worked up against miscreants in this way.

(iii) Before you run a game or activity, announce whether it will count towards the competition or not and the number of points that will be awarded to the winners. If you leave it till afterwards, suspicions are bound to be aroused.

(iv) Announce every week how each Patrol is doing. Better still, pin up on the notice board a graphic diagram.

(v) The reward to be allotted to the winner can be a difficult subject. Roland Philipps had some sound advice on this:

The important question to be considered is what the competition is to be for. If a Scoutmaster decides this question by himself he will find that the Patrol competition falls flat. A Scoutmaster who is thinking what he wants and not what his boys want can hardly complain if he fails to find much Scouting enthusiasm in his Troop.

How true that is, both on this particular subject and on your programme as a whole.

FAILURES

Expect failures of all sorts and at all times: the P.L. throwing his hand in; the Patrol sit-down strike at camp; the Patrol so divided by jealousy and incompatibility that its Scouts never work together or agree; the Patrol camp that is a flop; the Troop camp that you just cannot get working on Patrol lines; the stodgy "we-hardly-know-each-other" Patrol.

But re-assure yourself with this. You will have taught more by a few good failures than you will ever do by running a perfect Scouter-organised Troop. Grasp the opportunities these failures bring by working out in your own mind where things have gone wrong and by discussing them with the Court of Honour. Point out their mistakes and your own, and let something be learnt from them. Ask for more from some Patrols than you do from others, but never expect perfection. Do not be persuaded to switch the Patrol System off and on.

The whole time, remember that the principal purpose of the Patrol System is to teach P.L.s to lead and Scouts to follow, and that mistakes and failures must necessarily be inevitable.

Two final points remain, to be made.

First, the Patrol System will never run by itself. It needs to be started and kept alive by the energy and foresight of the Scouters. It is not true to say that once the boys have been put into Patrols and a P.L. appointed all that is needed is a free hand. The average boy nowadays is so drugged with television and so accustomed to entertainment that makes no demands on him that his initiative must continually be stirred up and kept alive.

This means hard work and clever thinking from the S.M.

Secondly, when you are tempted to give up trying to expand the Patrol System in your Troop, just imagine for a moment what the alternative is, the damage that other methods can do and the opportunities that can be missed.

The alternative is the Troop run by the S.M. and his Scouters; when orders replace decisions that could be made by the boys themselves; where discipline is imposed from above instead of built up by the Troop itself; no training in leadership; no planning by Scouts – just a rigid, unimaginative, military hierarchy, with half the fun and most of the point dried out of Scouting.