



**THE SCOUTER'S BOOKS – No. 2**  
**THE COURT OF HONOUR**

**BY**

**JOHN THURMAN**

*“Scouting is a boy's game but a man's job.”*

Lord Rowallan, February 1945

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Editor's Note:

The reader is reminded that these texts have been written a long time ago. Consequently, they may use some terms or express sentiments which were current at the time, regardless of what we may think of them at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For reasons of historical accuracy they have been preserved in their original form.

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## The Court of Honour

### What it is.

The Court of Honour is as old as Scouting and in my view is absolutely fundamental to successful Scouting in the Troop.

Now that is a pretty definite and, indeed, a dogmatic statement, and is meant as such. Without the Court of Honour trying to do its job effectively the Patrol System itself is not only bound to fail but is in some respects potentially dangerous. Through Scouting we have always the problem of developing on the one hand self-reliance, which is a very different thing from self-sufficiency, and, on the other hand, showing a boy through the activities of Scouting his relationships with other people and gradually giving him an unselfish approach to everything he does. The Patrol System worked without the Court of Honour can almost imperceptibly lead into selfishness, arrogance, and a whole host of other undesirable qualities. We there for inevitably arrive at this point: – If the Scout Troop is to give full value to its members it must be run using the Patrol System, and the Patrol System itself must include a full understanding and use of the Court of Honour or, put more simply, if we stick to the teaching of the Founder as laid down in “*Scouting for Boys*,” we stand a chance of achieving some real results.

When I think back over the successful Troops I have known through the years, the Troops I have been proud to acknowledge in this country and in many other countries, time and time again I have been impressed by the fact that these were or still are the Troops where the Court of Honour realised its functions as the Founder conceived them and was allowed to fulfil them, where the Patrol Leaders had a sense of unselfish responsibility, and where the emphasis was on the honour of the Troop.

### B.-P. devised it

B.-P. was an essentially modest man and very often had little to say about his greatest ideas: he gave us the germ of the idea and left us to work it out in practice. His first reference to the Court of Honour is in “*Scouting for Boys*.” and I quote it in full because I want you to re-read it, accepting it without reservation as the aim towards which we should work. Now when I say re-read, I mean take it slowly, ponder each phrase, absorb its innermost meaning, and make it a real part of your Scouting understanding and philosophy.

*Extract from “Scouting for Boys”.*

“A Court of Honour is formed of the Scoutmaster and the Patrol Leaders, or, in the case of a small Troop, of the Patrol Leaders and Seconds. In many Courts the Scoutmaster attends the meetings, but does not vote.

The Court of Honour decides rewards, punishments, programmes of work, camps, and other questions affecting Troop management.

The members of the Court of Honour are pledged to secrecy; only those decisions which affect the whole Troop, e.g., appointments, competitions, etc., would be made public.”

### Not just an idea

One of the most over-worked words in current life is “inspiration.” I say over-worked because inspiration alone, in mid-air, as it were, never has achieved and never can produce anything; it is only when inspiration is built upon the sure foundation of solid fact that achievement is possible. The Court of Honour is, or should be, a solid fact.

I suppose that most people will agree that “*Scouting for Boys*” is inspirational; it is inspirational, of course, because it is practical, but perhaps it has not occurred to you that there is inspiration in such an apparently mundane publication as “Policy, Organisation and Rules.” There are few finer phrases in the whole of Scout literature than those contained in Rule 239(2), “The Court of Honour is responsible for guarding the honour of the Troop.” Ponder that too, and ask yourself if your Court of Honour gets anywhere near doing just that. The rule goes on to more matter-of-fact things such as the internal administration of the Troop and the expenditure of Troop funds, but I want you to face up to this responsibility for the guardianship of the honour of the Troop; I want you to accept that this is the first and most important function of the Court of Honour and that unless you can get across to your Patrol Leaders this sense of responsibility for tradition and honour, both personal and corporate, then your Court of Honour will be not as the Founder intended it to be but just another committee meeting. Committees, of course, have their place in Scouting as in all democratic institutions: they have problems to resolve and duties to fulfil, but the Court of Honour is on a much higher plane; it is concerned primarily with those hard-to-put-into words but nonetheless real things which concern the emotions, the feelings, and the sensibilities of people. It is out of the Court of Honour that the true spirit of Scouting and, therefore, the true spirit for our Troop must grow and flourish.

I wonder how many Scoutmasters, when there is an addition to the Court of Honour through the appointment of a new Patrol Leader, remember to read over to those assembled the words I quoted above from P.O.R. and from “*Scouting for Boys*.” You can call them the terms of reference if you like, although I would call them something more important. I have never yet known any committee to function effectively unless its terms of reference were clearly outlined before the meeting started; knowing what we are supposed to do is vital. If it is true that adults cannot hope to achieve success unless they know what they are attempting, surely it is even more true of a crowd of boys. Give them the job and the leadership and they will find a way to achieve success, but a Court of Honour which meets spasmodically without any particular purpose will rarely find one.

It is against this background of honour and purpose that I want to try to guide you in the actual workings of the Court of Honour. Let me admit freely at the start that all of us who have tried to work the Patrol System have found it difficult and sometimes disappointing; we have all been let down by individual Patrol Leaders, and the Patrol Leaders have sometimes been let down by the Scoutmaster, but reflection shows me that it was the effort to make it work on the lines the Founder indicated which ultimately produced the strength and the spiritual unity which is essential to the proper leadership of any Troop. In other words, to have faith in the Scout method, not to give up because of difficulties, not to try to do things by some different means, but to have “stickability” of purpose, are the essentials required of any Scoutmaster.

I want now to lead you phrase by phrase through that paragraph of “*Scouting for Boys*.”

First of all, the formation of the Court of Honour. Some who read this will perhaps be starting new Troops and there are special conditions which apply to them. It is a great mistake to

say, “We will get the Troop running first and the Court of Honour will grow out of it.” The correct way is to get the Court of Honour working properly and to let the Troop grow out of that. The first meeting is the one where you start to establish tradition and, whether you realise this or not, it is so. A good start to any new endeavour is quite invaluable. Without a conscious effort to build a worthwhile tradition you will inevitably start a bad or poor one. If you are starting a new Troop presumably you have the wisdom to start with comparatively few boys or, at any rate, to give special attention to the older recruits who will be the first batch of Patrol Leaders and Seconds. As soon as they have passed the Tenderfoot Test and been invested they should be formed into a Court of Honour and should begin to establish the traditions on which the Troop is to be founded. This will give your selected Patrol Leaders a sense of responsibility and the immediate opportunity to make suggestions for activities; about who is and who is not going to be allowed to join the Troop; and, not least, it will be through the Court of Honour that you, as their leader, will begin to understand the characters of your Patrol Leaders.

Of course, much of this is true of the established Troop. It is necessary to pause and remember that the make-up of any Court of Honour is of necessity constantly under change; boys grow up in Scouting and pass on to another section of the Movement, and it is a strange Troop where all the individuals on the Court of Honour will remain the same for more than twelve months. We therefore have the continuing problem or, as I see it, the continuing opportunity for giving through the Court of Honour the same training, the same chance to absorb tradition, and the same opportunity to accept responsibility, to an unending flow of recruits to its ranks.

### Membership

I must deal with the membership of the Court of Honour. Obviously. Patrol Leaders attend and, in the case of a small Troop, the Seconds as well. If this prompts the question “What is a small Troop?” I would answer that any Troop of three or fewer Patrols is a small Troop and the Seconds should attend for all except the inner business of the Court of Honour, to which I will refer later. If the Troop has more than four Patrols then I do not think the Seconds should have any part in the Court of Honour except on occasions when a Patrol Leader is unavoidably absent. I believe the Court of Honour works best when it is small; in fact, it is a Patrol of Patrol Leaders guided by the Scoutmaster. Some Scouters like to think of themselves as the Patrol Leader of their Patrol Leaders and up to a point this is all right although it is not a complete analogy as there are dangers in following that pattern to a conclusion.

### The Scouter

B.-P. said this of the Scouter’s position with the Court of Honour: “The Scoutmaster attends the meeting but does not vote.” In the Patrol Leaders’ Handbook the illustrator produced a delightful cartoon showing Scoutmaster, who had clearly been trying to vote, recumbent in his chair with a growing bump on his head, the Patrol Leaders having dealt in an un-Scout-like but reliable way with his desire to intervene.

You will notice that nothing is said about Assistant Scoutmasters. The senior A.S.M., the fellow I would call “Deputy Scoutmaster” should always attend the Court of Honour for the sake of continuity and because it is necessary in regard to some of the business of the Court of Honour for Scouters other than the Scoutmaster himself to know what is going on, but the Court of Honour should certainly not be open to Instructors or any other unwarranted helpers. If you can

establish that an invitation to the Court of Honour meeting is a privilege and not a right you are very much on the right lines.

To sum up, then, the Court of Honour will be composed of all Patrol Leaders, the Troop Leader (if there is one) who should be the Chairman, Seconds in the case of a small Troop or as deputy for a Patrol Leader, the Scoutmaster and one or two A.S.M.'s, attending in an advisory capacity but not voting.

The Scoutmaster does not, repeat not, take the Chair. Some adults seem to have an extraordinary desire for taking the Chair on every conceivable occasion, but in the Court of Honour, however keen the Scouter may be, however able he may be, he will keep out of the Chair and will remember that the Court of Honour is the boys' own show, it is their job to run it and the Scouter is there only to advise and not to interfere. The Troop Leader or the senior Patrol Leader is the obvious Chairman, although there is some advantage in the chairmanship moving round about every three months.

### **“Its decisions are secret”**

“Members of the Court of Honour are pledged to secrecy.” What a wise provision is this which the Founder made, and how stupid we are to overlook it. Some adults have an infinite capacity for knocking the romance out of Scouting. One of the essentials of a Scout Troop is the very proper delight of the normal boy in secret societies. This secrecy should be one of the privileges of being a Patrol Leader. Properly handled it will delight the Court of Honour and stimulate the rest of the Troop, but carried to excess it can become absurd, give rise to the wildest of rumours, and end in utter confusion. When handled intelligently, secrecy is a very valuable spice in the Scout cake.

B.-P. went on to say, “Only those decisions which affect the whole Troop, e.g., appointments, competitions, would be made public.” Well, let's stick to that – it is so eminently sensible, and do at least try to let the Patrol Leaders tell their Patrols instead of the Scoutmaster always telling the whole Troop.

### **Court of Honour Room**

When I was in Australia I was tremendously impressed with the Court of Honour Rooms which I was privileged to see in several Troop Headquarters. I thought again about the successful Troops in this country and I realised how many of them had Court of Honour rooms, a room into which only the members of the Court of Honour are admitted and to which only the members have keys. I witnessed in Australia, as at home, the effect that had both on the Patrol Leaders and on the Scouts who made up the Troop. It makes for a continuing desire to aspire to membership of the Court of Honour which will lead many Scouts over a hurdle which they might not otherwise have bothered to climb.

The Court of Honour Room can be decorated as the Court of Honour decides, perhaps with the Scout Promise and Law prominently displayed, the Troop Log, and an Honours Board for Queens Scouts, First Class Badges awarded, and for past Patrol Leaders. Here are kept trophies, the Colours, and the jawbone of the moose that somehow became the driving force of Summer Camp 194-. It may be that many of these things will be displayed in the Troop Room itself, and certainly the Troop as a whole should see them, but here, in the Court of Honour Room, they can be of great significance.

I know that many of you who read this will say that you meet in a schoolroom or a church hall and cannot have a room of your own, but if you do say this you are thinking of the wrong sort of room. A Court of Honour room can be similar to a Patrol Den, the sort of place which will serve our purpose but is probably no use to anyone else, a loft, a store room in a basement, almost anything. Surely it is not beyond the wit of even the most urban Troop to find something somewhere about eight feet square which will serve this purpose. If the lead is given to the Patrol Leaders I am satisfied they will make an effort to find their own Court of Honour room, especially if they are told it is to be theirs and no one else will be admitted to it.

### **When to meet**

How often should the Court of Honour meet? There is no single or simple answer to this question. It should meet formally at least once a month but it will have to meet in any emergency and for any special purpose, and it can with advantage meet after each Troop meeting. When the Troop is in camp the Court of Honour should meet daily, preferably at the end of the day when the Patrols are going to bed under the command of the Seconds. Writing that brings back memories of summer nights round the dying embers of the camp fire.

For the monthly meetings there should be a businesslike agenda and a definite time of meeting, with a scribe to keep the records, but for its ad hoc meetings none of this is essential although the scribe should try to keep notes as it adds dignity and permanence to the work of the Court of Honour and, in any case, is good training for the scribe – another job which ought to go the rounds.

### **The Patrol Leaders and their Patrols**

Patrol Leaders attend the Court of Honour in their own right, to take their share in guarding the honour of the Troop and their share of the business and planning for the Troop, but they are also there as representatives of their Patrols. In my experience this latter point is the hardest part of the whole business to get across. Many boys are inclined to selfishness and I am afraid that often only the Patrol Leader's personal point of view is put forward. It is a tremendous opportunity to train a boy in democratic living, to let him learn to represent the Scouts in his Patrol and to put their case even when he personally does not entirely agree with it, to speak on behalf of his Patrol and not merely on his own behalf. There are three great lessons in the art of living which he can absorb through this; one I have referred to already, that of learning to put the case of other people. The second is that of learning to accept success graciously and defeat without rancour, and the third is to go back after he has lost the day and secure the complete loyalty of his Patrol to follow the will of the majority. He will find it difficult to do this and on occasion he may find it unpleasant, but in trying to do it his own character will be strengthened and, after all, that is what it's all about.

It may be that the Owl Patrol in Council has decided that the Troop ought to do a lot more mapping; the Patrol Leader agrees and goes along to the Court of Honour determined to put the case for extended mapping practice so forcibly that all the other Patrol Leaders will agree. Ably as he presents his case it fails to ring the bell and no support is forthcoming; the Court of Honour decides that what is needed is more pioneering. The Patrol Leader of the Owls, who has done a good job but achieved no success, must go back and secure the enthusiastic support of the Owl Patrol for the pioneering in which the Troop is going to engage. Scouting being so delightfully elastic, he can go back and say, "Well, we are going to pioneer with the Troop, but as a Patrol

during our own meetings we will get on with the mapping.” It is a tremendous thing that he can learn the lessons of success and defeat, can secure loyalty for something they did not much want to do, and still have the courage, enthusiasm and energy to get on and do the things his Patrol wanted to do.

### **The Court of Honour and the Troop Programme**

In the last few paragraphs I have given an indication as to the kind of matters of programme the Court of Honour should discuss. It is not their job to provide in detail for every minute of every Troop Meeting; their function is to generalise and to discuss the programme after a Troop Meeting. If all the Patrol Leaders know what is going to happen at any given time in a Troop Meeting we are taking away from them a great deal of the fun that grows out of the unknown. Troop Meetings run in a rut are the sure way of blunting enthusiasm. Games and activities of that sort should not be cut and dried so that they become a mere routine. It is entirely right that the Patrol Leaders should discuss past programmes, what they liked and did not like, the balance between work and play, and perhaps to say that a certain game run by one of the A.S.M.s was unintelligible and should not be repeated, but this is a very different thing from sitting down and planning a complete schedule covering every item in every Troop Meeting. They should generalise in the way indicated above, to say they want more pioneering or less signalling, more first aid or less map-reading, more time for Patrol Meetings and fewer games, more opportunities for Patrol camps. Whatever the pattern, and providing it is all positive and progressive, the Scouter must accept it and devise ways of bringing the skeleton to life. Having given the Scouters the lead, do be clear that it is up to the Scouters to work out the details, otherwise the whole thing becomes too matter of fact and the surprise and adventure which must grow out of the unknown is taken away.

### **Rewards**

Now I want to hark right back to the quotation from “*Scouting for Boys*”, this question of rewards and punishments. These are rather old-fashioned words in today’s world but nonetheless, they are Sound and worth a moment’s thought. The Court of Honour can fulfil a tremendous function in regard to the award of Badges, which are the reward for effort and achievement. The examiner for a badge can deal only with the Scout vis-a-vis the conditions of the particular badge. In other words, the examiner is concerned to know that the Scout can, for instance, signal accurately at the approved rate. He decides that the Scout can fulfil the requirements of the test or that he cannot do so: what the examiner cannot know is what sort of a Scout the fellow is. Does the boy taking the badge pull his weight in the Patrol, is he a credit to the Troop, is he making a real effort or is he just concerned with his own personal progress? The Court of Honour, as the guardian of the honour of the Troop and as the body which deals with rewards, should be allowed to say whether or not a particular boy should enter for a badge. In my old Troop no boy ever entered for a badge unless and until the Court of Honour approved. They were concerned as to whether he tried to live up to the Scout Promise and supported his Patrol, etc. If, through your leadership as Scoutmaster, you can get the Court of Honour to accept this function and with your guidance put it into practice you will find a tremendous strengthening of the whole spirit of your Troop.

Under the general heading of rewards we ought also to include Inter-patrol Competitions and District or possibly County Competitions where one or other of the Patrols in the Troop will



be representing the Troop. For a Patrol competition the Court of Honour should decide the general scope of the competition but not all the details, e.g., is it to include inspection, games, attendances, progress in badge work, etc., or is it to be limited to certain specific items of Scouting such as a week-end camp. As with the compilation of the programme for a Troop Meeting, the details are the concern of the Scouters, but the generality is the concern of the Court of Honour.

When it comes to one Patrol representing the Troop in a District or County competition it should be the Court of Honour's decision, and the wise Scoutmaster, even if he does not agree with the choice of Patrol, will let the Court of Honour have its way. It is better by far for the wrong Patrol to enter for the competition as the real representative of the Troop than for the best Patrol to enter it at the order of the Scoutmaster.

### Punishment

Time was, in the bad or good old days, whichever way you look at the matter, when the Scoutmaster awarded as punishments such things as spud-peeling, latrine-digging, night-guard, and a whole host of necessary but unexciting fatigues essential to the running of the camp. Through the years we have learned better and we now realise that any job which has to be done for the benefit of the Troop as a whole is not a punishment but is something even more than a duty, for it is a privilege to be allowed to try to do something for the Troop. Once a Court of Honour accepts this point of view, and it is not difficult to get it accepted, we immediately shut the door on the bad idea that work is something meted out as a punishment.

Inevitably there are cases where some form of action is needed. In the last resort the Court of Honour can dismiss a Scout from the Troop, but it should be the last resort. Let it be said, however, that we must never allow the whole Troop to be sacrificed because of the inability of one of its members to conform. I hope that in most Troops the question of dismissing a boy from Scouting arises but seldom. Nonetheless, there are punishments which from time to time will have to be considered and I hope that the main punishment will be that of depriving the boy of privileges which the good Scout earns.

The Court of Honour will need to be guided skilfully and carefully by the Scoutmaster because boys sitting in judgment upon each other tend to be very cruel; the Scoutmaster must see that mercy tempers justice and he will often find himself in the position of "Devil's Advocate." It is no bad thing to suspend a Scout, particularly from things which it is known he enjoys, but the suspension should not be of long duration, perhaps two Troop Meetings and a week-end camp or something in the nature of an outing.

In the world as it is today all this is of increasing importance. There is a tendency amongst boys to regard their Scouting too cheaply and to fail to understand that privileges carry with them responsibility and that responsibility does not necessarily confer privileges, it is not easy to get all this understood by the Court of Honour, but the Scouters have to try, and it can be done as many Troops prove day by day.

In regard to this matter of punishments perhaps above all others we should be careful that the Court of Honour does meet in secrecy and that its decision is not broadcast to all and sundry in the Troop.

One last point arises: when it comes to punishment the boy's Scoutmaster must accept full responsibility and must not seek to hide behind the Court of Honour. In effect this means that the Scoutmaster must agree with the decision made by the Court of Honour or, to be more practical, he must be sure that the Court of Honour arrives at the decision he wants them to arrive at.

### **Standards of Behaviour**

We are back to this question of guarding the honour of the Troop. Through the Court of Honour and the example of the Patrol Leaders who form it must be set the highest possible standards in regard to smartness, behaviour in public, language, camping, and general efficiency. If once a Court of Honour will accept responsibility in this regard then it is a far more effective way of getting the right spirit in the Troop than any amount of talking and haranguing by the Scoutmaster. Pride of membership is essential to the Scout Movement as a whole and to each individual in a Troop. Every boy should believe that he is in the best Patrol in the best Troop in the whole world. This does not mean that he regards other Troops as less than the dust, but it does mean that he regards them as a little lower than his own Troop and their angelic selves.

Now a word under the various headings of the things I have mentioned: –

#### *Smartness.*

Pride in uniform; advising recruits to get the best quality they can afford; making sure every boy knows the exact place where each badge is to be put – none of this vague stuff “on the left shoulder” or “on the right-hand pocket.” It is the job of the Court of Honour to lay down the standard with exactness and for each individual Patrol Leader to see that his Scouts conform.

#### *Behaviour in public*

It is not easy to draw the line between high spirits, which are to be encouraged, and being a nuisance to other people, but the line has to be drawn, and it is best drawn by the Court of Honour. In the nature of things most Troops find themselves in the public eye, on public transport, on the move in the streets of the town in which they live, etc. The Court of Honour must set the standard of behaviour in town and country, and perhaps particularly in regard to summer camps. For example, the camp hat is an admirable thing in camp and there are few things which delight me more than some fantastic creation which lights up at night, made from an old cushion, with inappropriate mottoes hanging on in positions which defy the laws of gravity, but what a disastrous thing it is to see outside the camp. Scouts do wear camp hats out of camp because in their ignorance they do not know any better and they come from Troops where the Court of Honour has no standard of smartness and the Patrol Leaders are merely boys who wear two stripes because they have been there a little longer.

#### *Language.*

Few things spread more rapidly amongst a group of boys than does slackness in speech. In the early days of Scouting there was a good old-fashioned remedy: anyone who swore had a cup of cold water down the sleeve, but some fresh air fanatic had the sleeves cut off! We do not want to return to remedies of that sort, but the Court of Honour must be concerned that the Scouts in the Troop try to keep the Tenth Scout Law in speech as well as in deed. The example of the Patrol Leaders is most important. Bad language is a display of ignorance and a poor range of

adjectives; instead of using the wonderful compass of the English language every single noun is accompanied by the same adjective. As I have said, this sort of thing can be very catching and it must be dealt with by the Court of Honour immediately there is any sign of it breaking out, and it must be dealt with firmly and definitely and with no argument at all.

### *Camping.*

Right from the start the Court of Honour must take pride in setting the highest possible standard of camping, not only in technical efficiency but also in regard to courtesy in the countryside, helpfulness to other people and usefulness to other campers. Nothing less than the best will do.

### Random thoughts

“The Scout” and “The Scouter.”

Make sure the Court of Honour has a copy of “The Scout” and “The Scouter.” Each Patrol Leader should have his own but there should be copies in the Court of Honour Room and available at its meetings.

### Keeping up to Date.

Changes in Rules, Tests and Badges must be explained and discussed at the Court of Honour Meetings. Notice of District, County, or International Scout events should first be announced at the Court of Honour.

### The World-wide Brotherhood.

The live Court of Honour will find out about visiting Scouts and bring them to the Troop.

## **The Court of Honour in Session**

Report from a more-than-usually-observant fly on the ceiling at the Court of Honour Meeting of the 1st Nonesuch Troop, a Troop which has been established for ten years, owns its own Headquarters, and seems to be a fairly lively show.

### *Those present.*

Bill Springs, age sixteen years, Queen’s Scout of eighteen months standing, Troop Leader and formerly P.L. of the Owl Patrol (in the Chair).

Tom Jackson, First Class Scout, P.L. Owl Patrol.

Jim Baxter, First Class Scout, P.L. ‘Pecker Patrol.

Ron Hainmants, First Class Scout, P.L. Pigeon Patrol (Scribe).

“Tubby” Cross, First Class Scout, P.L. Cuckoo Patrol.

Skipper Harrison, S.M. (holds the Wood Badge).

Tony Thomas, A.S.M.

The Group is an Open Group containing boys of many denominations from various districts in the town.

The meeting was called for 8.00 hours on a Tuesday evening and duly assembled in the Court of Honour Room in the Troop Headquarters.

The Court of Honour Room is quite small, being eight feet by six feet. The walls are attractively decorated and hold copies of the Camping Standards Certificates for the last nine summer camps, an Honours Board showing all the First Class and King's and Queen's Scouts, twenty-six of the former and fourteen of the latter. There is a board for each Patrol, setting out the names of the previous Patrol Leaders and the dates of their terms of office, the Troop Flag and the Union Flag, and illuminated copies of the Scout Promise and Law. In one corner is a small bookcase containing the Court of Honour Library, and in the centre of the room is a small table surrounded by ten collapsable chairs, only seven on which are needed for the meeting this evening. The table itself is covered by a Scout-green cloth in the centre of which is worked the Scout Badge and the Troop emblem as worn on the point of the scarf.

The meeting is called to order by Bill Springs and he asks them to stand in silence for a moment. (In an Open Group this is clearly the best way to begin as a prayer would be inappropriate with mixed religions). The meeting then gets under way without any delay and the Troop Leader asks the Scribe to read the Minutes of the last meeting, which are short and to the point and contain nothing of outstanding interest.

The procedure is then as follows: –

T.L.            May I take it that the Minutes are a correct record of our last meeting? Those in favour say 'Aye.'  
All             Aye.  
T.L.            Is it your wish that I sign them?  
All             Agreed.

*The T.L. signs the Minute Book and passes it to the Scribe, first looking through it and announcing*

T.L.            That seems to be all right and I don't think there is anything arising.

The T.L. then calls on each P.L. in turn: –

T.L.            Tom, what have you got to say about the Owls?  
P.L. Owls     We're pretty good. Since the last meeting two of my Patrol have gained their Second Class; we held one Patrol Meeting, part of which was spent repairing the Patrol Den bookcase and part of which we gave over to mending our buzzer equipment and then practising with it. We had a full turn out.  
T.L.            The 'Peckers, Jim?  
P.L. Peckers   The two recruits we had from the Pack aren't bad; they have both done fire-lighting and cooking. I always try to get this testing through in the winter so that they can get real experience.  
T.L.            Well, that's nothing to boast about; its Troop tradition anyway, but I am glad you are carrying it out for a change.  
P.L. Peckers   We haven't had a proper Patrol Meeting except that we went on a hike a fortnight ago; all present except three. We went about eight miles and explored the old mill.

- PL. Owls        It's about time you found another hike route; you've been reporting about the old mill for the last eight months.
- T.L.            Well, perhaps you can offer him one of your more imaginative hikes.
- P.L. Peckers    Thanks very much, but we're doing all right. The Owls can carry on with their own route marches.
- T.L.            Anything else. Jim?
- P.L. Peckers    Yes. My Patrol think we ought to change round the Patrol Corners in the Troop Headquarters. We've been nearest the draught and furthest from the fire ever since the Troop started and we think it's time someone else had a turn.
- T.L.            Well I think that's a matter for the Scoutmaster.
- S.M.            It certainly opens up all sorts of possibilities. Perhaps we have been a bit hard on the 'Peckers. In any case, I was going to suggest later on that it was time some of the Patrol Corners were re-made as the decorations are looking a bit musty. It might be a good idea to draw lots for the corners as some are obviously better than others and then to agree to move round once a year.
- T.L.            That seems a pretty sound suggestion to me so long as the Owls don't have to move.
- S.M.            I think it has to be all or none.
- T.L.            I suppose it has really, but there will be a bit of hard feeling about it.
- P.L. Peckers    Well, there's hard feeling in my Patrol anyway; we think the best corners ought to be shared round as well as the worst.
- T.L.            Anybody else want to say anything about this?
- P.L. Cuckoos    I'm prepared to vote in favour of Skipper's suggestion. There'll be a bit of grumbling to start with but I think my chaps would benefit from a change of scene and I can't get them interested in doing anything with their present corner, so I hope we do shift.
- T.L.            All right then, we'll put it to the vote, but I think before you come to any final decision you ought to consult your Patrols in Council and then we can vote on it at the next meeting. Is that agreed?

*Nods of assent make it obvious that it is agreed.*

*(Comment: The S.M. had been wanting to make this suggestion for many months as there was no doubt that the 'Peckers had been handicapped by having the worst corner in the Headquarters, but very wisely he had not made the suggestion until the opportunity arose and he feels pleased with the way things have gone).*

- T.L.            Now, Ron, your turn: what about the Pigeons?
- P.L. Pigeons    Well, I think we're doing all right except that I've chosen the wrong Second. I thought young Bob was going to be a great success but each time I have left him to do some thing he has let me down and he doesn't seem interested any more. Since we made him a Second he hasn't passed a single badge and neither is he working for anything.
- T.L.            Any comments, Skipper?
- S.M.            I think Ron is right, but he made the choice and he either has to stand by it or recommend that he has a new Second. Might it not be an idea to have Bob up

- before the Court of Honour at the next meeting and see what he has to say for himself?
- P.L. Pigeons Yes, it might be an idea, and I think we ought to give him a chance, but just at the moment I'm not getting anywhere at all with him. Other than that, the Patrol is very happy and I hope they'll all be Second Class before summer camp.
- A.S.M. Could I say a word about the Pigeons?
- T.L. Yes, of course; carry on.
- A.S.M. Well I think they are getting too keen on their own personal progress and letting some of their other activities slide. Last month, as you know, I was in charge of the Duty Patrol for Headquarters. The Owls, the Cuckoos, and the 'Peckers did quite a good job but the Pigeons hardly did anything at all and, in fact, I had to wash up the cocoa pot and sweep out the Troop Room because they all slipped away as soon as the meeting was over. I don't mind doing this sort of thing, but I think it's bad for the Patrol.
- T.L. What about that, Ron?
- P.L. Pigeons It's true enough. The A.S.M. had to do those things. The washing up was the Second's fault as he was in charge of that but I must take responsibility for lack of sweeping. As a matter of fact it looked all right to us and I was in a hurry to get away so we just skipped it.
- S.M. I think there is a point I ought to make here. No one is more keen than I am that chaps should get through their tests, but their personal progress must be lined up with the general responsibility of each Patrol as a whole. I think the Pigeons have slipped back a bit and it is up to you, Ron, to pull them together again."
- P.L. Pigeons O.K. Skipper; I think we've just had a bad month.
- T.L. Now the Cuckoos. What about you, Tubby?
- P.L. Cuckoos There's no doubt about it, we continue to be the best Patrol in the Troop. We've had two Patrol Meetings and twelve tests passed in the month. We had a hike three weeks ago, and not to the old mill either, but I'm not going to tell you where we went as we've found a grand new place. I'm pretty pleased with my Patrol and I think they are terrific!
- T.L. I agree it all sounds very nice, and there's nothing like blowing your own trumpet because no one else is going to do it for you. Any comments, Skipper, on the Cuckoos?
- S.M. Yes, I have. I think they're getting a bit 'uppish' and a little bit too keen to win. It's true they have had a good month, and they won the Patrol Competition again, but once or twice in games I think they've been more keen than fair. In a way it was good management on your part, Tubby, to put all your heavy men against the small ones from the other Patrol in the "Horses and Riders" game, but I don't think it was very good Scouting.
- P.L. Cuckoos Maybe we have got things a bit out of focus. We've a meeting next week and I wonder if you would come down, Skipper, and have a yarn with them without mentioning anything in particular?
- S.M. Yes, of course I will. We'll fix up a time after the Court of Honour is over.
- T.L. The next item we have to deal with is the programme for the Troop weekend camp in two weeks' time. Anybody got any ideas?

P.L. Peckers    We talked this over in the Patrol and we suggest that one meal should be Backwoods Cooking, preferably Saturday night's supper.

T.L.            All right, what do you others think of that?

P.L. Cuckoos   I think it's a rotten idea. Last time we tried it I didn't get any supper at all.

P.L. Owls       Gosh, you're big enough to live on your fat for a week! I think it's a jolly good idea and we ought to do it.

T.L.            Ron, what do you think?

P.L. Pigeons    I'm all for it: I'm not too sure about the Patrol though, but I'll ask them.

T.L.            Who's going to arrange it? I wonder if the A.S.M. would have the right sort of food available?

A.S.M.          Yes, I can do that. Will you just leave it to me or does anybody want to suggest anything in particular?

P.L. Owls       Oh, lets leave it to Tony; he'll fix us up all right. I'd only say that it is a rotten time of the year for eating rabbits and I hope they won't be on the menu.

A.S.M.          All right, Tom; duly noted. It will probably be hedgehog instead.

T.L.            Any other ideas for the programme?

P.L. Cuckoos   My chaps want to try out the Patrol Swing Bridge.

P.L. Owls       Never heard of it!

P.L. Cuckoos   We know you cant read, but we didn't suggest that everybody tried it. Can't we have a couple of hours on the Sunday when each Patrol has a definite project, pioneering or whatever else they like?

T.L.            What do you think, Skipper?

S.M.            I think it's an excellent idea. If you like I'll produce four separate projects and let you have them next week so that you can discuss them with your Patrols and we will make sure all the necessary gear is there.

T.L.            That's a bit easy, isn't it? Why can't each Patrol provide it's own gear?

P.L. Owls       Since you became T.L. you've been jolly keen on the P.L.'s doing all the work. I like Skipper's idea.

T.L.            Well, I think you're wrong, but if that is what you want have it that way. Agreed?

All              Yes.

T.L.            The next thing I have on the list is an application for membership, and perhaps the S.M. will say a word about it.

S.M.            Actually, I've had two boys along to see me, Harry Bryce and Jack Rawlings. They are both eleven years old and very keen to join. They've not been Cubs and that is part of the trouble because we have to keep room for four Cubs coming up later this year and all the Patrols are full except that the Pigeons can take one more. I think we have to consider having a fifth Patrol.

P.L. Cuckoos   That's going to make a mess of the Patrol Corners if anything is. We can't get five corners out of four.

P.L. Owls       But there's plenty of wall; you can have a flat corner, can't you?

P.L. Peckers    Try telling that to my maths master!

S.M.            I've seen these two boys and their parents and I think we ought to take them. Perhaps between now and the next meeting you can think over the idea of extending the Troop to five or six Patrols. I must say I'd like to see six, and your Second, Tom, is about ready to become a P.L. and I'm sure we could produce another.

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## The Court Of Honour

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- T.L. That's seems a good idea. Perhaps these two recruits can be invited to the next Troop Meeting and come up before the Court of Honour in a month's time when we shall know a bit more about them. Now the next thing is the S.M.'s announcements. Over to you, Skipper.
- S.M. I've not much this month. I have had particulars of the Camping Competition and it is for one normal Patrol.
- P.L. Cuckoos What makes you think we've got such a thing? All ours are a bit screwy.
- SM. All right, as normal as we can get it. It's the third week-end in September; the usual site and usual rules. We've not won it for three years and I must say I wouldn't mind winning it again as I think it is about time we did.
- T.L. Whose Patrol is it to be, then?
- P.L. Owls Wouldn't it be better to wait until after our week-end camp and then the Scouters can decide which is the best Patrol. I think they ought to decide in any case.
- T.L. If that's how you want it, it's O.K. with me. We'll leave it to you, Skipper, to run the week-end camp and then tell us which Patrol you've chosen. Anything else, Skipper?
- S.M. No, that's all for this month, but I would like to have a word at the end of the meeting.
- T.L. Any applications for Proficiency Badges?
- P.L. Owls Yes, young Jack Hilliard wanted to go in for the Messenger Badge. I'd like to support it; he's doing all right and is very keen, and he hasn't missed a meeting for over six months.
- T.L. Is that agreed?
- All Yes.
- T.L. Any other business? O.K. then Skipper, you said you wanted to have the last word; what's it about this time?
- S.M. Smoking, for a change. I expect I'm old-fashioned but I still think Patrol Leaders in uniform puffing cigarettes in camp sets a bad example to the rest of the Troop. I would like to ask that you put a ban on it and, if it would help, the A.S.M. and I are willing to give up smoking during the Troop week-end camp.
- P.L. Cuckoos Well that will save you a lot of money, Skipper.
- S.M. How many of you smoke regularly?

*Rather hesitatingly the T.L. and the P.L. Pigeons put up their hands.*

- S.M. Mind you, I don't think this is the sort of thing we can make rules about, but I am concerned about the example we set to the younger fellows in the Troop. I think we ought to try to avoid smoking in their presence.
- T.L. O.K., I'm willing to play ball with this one. Skipper is right and we do seem to have got a bit slack about it. I suggest that at the week-end camp we really do make an effort to pull ourselves together, about this and one or two other things. Any other business? No? Then I declare the meeting closed. Next meeting a month from tonight.



The fly on the ceiling noticed that although the formal business was over nobody seemed anxious to go away. The P.L. of the Pigeons slipped off to the kitchen and returned ten minutes later with a brew of tea for everybody. As his Patrol was not on duty this week it was obvious that the point the A.S.M. had made had gone home, at any rate temporarily.

Whilst having tea the S.M. began one of his apparently irrelevant but actually very valuable yarns. He knew his Patrol Leaders and he had the happy knack of suiting his yarn to the needs of the moment. On the face of it he wasn't talking about anything very much but somehow he was underlining the decisions they had arrived at and illustrating them with reminiscences from the past. It was three-quarters of an hour before the cups were washed and the final "Good Night" said.

As the Patrol Leaders left the Troop Headquarters they looked a little bigger and more like Patrol Leaders than when they arrived.