

Mild Eskimo Boy Scout Revolt— Youngsters Adapt Scout Program to Fit Own Lives

By MADELYN SHULMAN
Staff Writer

Think of a boy scout. So you visualize a clean cut kid in shorts pitching tents and helping little old ladies across traffic filled streets.

According to the 1971 Scouting manual, scouts go on hikes in the woods, bicycle hikes, learn woodcraft and the care of an ax and generally learn a little of the Indian lore their forefathers never knew.

Well, somehow the image never fit in Allakaket, Nome, Kotzebue or a dozen other native Alaskan villages north of the Alaska range. So, boy scouts there just took the uniform, the program and are adapting it to their lives and their surroundings.

Scouting in Alaska, according to Midnight Sun Council administrator George Brenner, is as old as scouting in the United States. A boy scout troop existed in Nome in 1910, the year scouting moved over from England to the United States. Yet, it wasn't till after World War II and its end that Alaska became a boy scout council, and then three—one each in Juneau, Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Northernmost is the Midnight Sun Council in Fairbanks, the

largest in the U.S. with its 347,000 square miles of land... From Fairbanks to St. Lawrence Island 2,153 boys are scouts. They attend summer camps in Allakaket, Unalakleet, Nome, Kiana and Barrow.

Boys from Allakaket go on a fifty mile hike each year. They work, as troops, to earn their 40 below zero certificates and 100 below certificates in Arctic survival. In Eskimo country scouts are working to readapt all the scouting rituals that came from Indian land = for country.

This is what Major John Schaefer is doing up in Nome with the Order of the Arrow, a Boy Scout honorary camping society. Filled with Indian rituals, it is popular as far north as Fort Yukon but feathered chiefs haven't gone over too well in Nome. So, he and his boys are rewriting the Order of the Arrow, redesigning the ceremonies from Indian to Eskimo.

In place of Indian dress, the boys want Eskimo ceremonial garb. They are developing an Eskimo dance group to join the Indian dance troops formed by other Order of the Arrow lodges in the U.S.

Once they've finished their rewrite, the Nome version of the lodge will be the model for other Eskimo villages, according to Brenner.

"We already use Eskimo games in our campfire and camp program—the finger pull and the high kick." At Camp Baker, he remembers, they ran finger pull contests between all the boys in camp—from the two tiniest to the two oldest and strongest.

It has mainly been in the last four years, according to Brenner, that scouting in Alaska began to reach out into the villages and bring their program to rural Alaskan boys.

In 1967, Midnight Sun received a grant from the Fleshman Foundation in Nevada—a three year grant for an extra man and travel expenses.

This last year, the grant ended, and Brenner finds himself again alone in an area which includes 20 widely separated towns, villages and cities.

To solve his communication problems, Brenner has tried many means. Recently, he's been using a taperecorder to record tapes to rural scoutmasters. On his trips to Nome and Kotzebue, Brenner organized radio roundtables.

There, surrounding village scout leaders meet him at a prearranged time via BIA radio

to discuss problems, future programs and other ideas which less isolated scout leaders would discuss at monthly meetings.

Paperwork is another big problem. Many bush troops have not bothered to register with the national organization.

"I sent a man to one village and he reported a thriving, active boy scout troop. They held frequent meetings, planned activities and planned to send several boys to scout camp that summer. Yet, they weren't on our lists.

Sometimes, he finds the scout troop exists when they begin to order uniforms through the boy scout office. Or, they begin to show up at boy scout camp.

Why scouting for native boys? Haven't they already been in fish camps, hunting camps, learned woods and/or ocean lore from their families?

"Not always," replied Brenner. Often, he thought, a boy may never have learned all the ways of the world—how to cook his own food, put up his own shelter, make his own fire. At camps, these things may have been done by others.

Above all, doing these activities together, teaches boys basic lessons in democracy and other forms of living together, Brenner added.

"We demand perfection in schools, but scouting gives the boy an opportunity to make mistakes, and learn by them."

Also, scouting gives many boys opportunities to travel, join scouting activities in other towns and cities, and even in other countries.

One Barrow scout, Luther Leavitt, has attended both a national scout jamboree four years ago and last year went to the World Jamboree in Japan; as well as other youth conferences. Other boys have gone to jamborees, summer camps and youth conferences across the country. Last year, over 20,000 boys including Billy Itta and Luther Leavitt of Barrow were evacuated from the World Jamboree site when the area was hit by a typhoon—an adventure the boys will remember for a long time.

Most boy scout jamborees feature the blanket toss, performed by Midnight Sun Council scouts with their own walrus skin blanket. They have developed a national reputation as the Eskimo troops—with their own culture and color to add to national events.

Still, George Brenner describes scouting in northern Alaska as "about like scouting anywhere else in the country. Just different."

\$200,000 Federal Grant Will Aid Flood Victims

A \$200,000 federal grant will enable residents of flood damaged villages on the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers to rebuild dikes, roads and dams, Senator Ted Stevens reports.

Alaska senior senator said the U.S. Department of Labor funds will be used to pay the wages of 300 villagers who will be taking

part in the project, the workers or residents of 30 villages on the two rivers that were hit by spring floods this year.

A total of 7,500 persons live in the 30 communities.

The work training will be administered by the Governor's Rural Development Agency, Senator Stevens said.

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Nenana Busing

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school began, the State Operated School Board, with jurisdiction over the students along the highway, reclassified the attendance center for students in Anderson and Clear from Nenana to Healy.

Five years ago, there was no high school in the valley. Then, with a high state subsidy (close to 100 per cent) the city of Nenana started one. The school is 20 miles from Anderson and Clear, a short bus distance in Alaska, according to Bradner and other knowledgeable officials.

When the SOS Board changed its attendance center, Nenana school protested. Each student lost meant a loss in state revenues. Then, Anderson decided to keep its ninth grade students in town, rather than send them to high school in Nenana.

"It's a sticky set of human problems with racial overtones," commented an observer.

As students started the school year last week a tentative compromise had been worked out. Bus routes would not change, according to Nenana school superintendent Richard Leath. Students who wished to attend other schools than those served by the bus route in their area would have to provide their own transportation.

Attorney General Havelock, in an opinion on the jurisdictional dispute last week, decided that the Alaska Statutes appear to give the board of the State Operated School final authority over the students in the highway area.

As busing disputes go on across the nation the one in Nenana stands out as extraordinary. Alaskans, with vast distances between populations, must tolerate an amount of school busing which would be intolerable in most other states.

Hundreds of native students must attend boarding schools and programs due to lack of facilities close enough to their homes.

Thus, when a busing dispute requires more mileage per school child, may be more expensive for the state and does not seem to provide any better education for the children—people wonder.

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