

REFLECTIONS ON A CLUB ACTIVITY

MP-17 (MILEPOST 17) RUSSELL PARK, SCOUT JAMBOREE CONTROL STATION

"NSALS, YOU'RE ASSIGNED STATION 'BAKER-NORTH' ALONG WITH SHELDON, THE SCOUT LEADER", BARKED KB5PM (DON), THE COORDINATOR. ALL THE HAMS AND THEIR SCOUT PARTNERS HEADED FOR THE BOAT RAMP TO BE DELIVERED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE STATIONS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MYSELF, BEING TOLD THAT MY STATION WAS JUST A SHORT WALK DOWN THE HIKING TRAIL.

RIGHT AWAY I KNEW THE FEELING OF APPREHENSION WHEN SHELDON WAS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND! IN ANSWER TO MY FRANTIC QUESTIONS, ONE SCOUT LEADER SAID, "OH, YEAH. HE ALREADY LEFT ABOUT AN HOUR AGO." STRAIGHTENING UP MY SHOULDERS, GRABBING MY GEAR AND WHISTLING A HAPPY TUNE, I EMBARKED ON THE TRAIL LEADING OFF INTO THE SHADOWED WILDERNESS BEFORE ME.

AFTER WALKING THE TRAIL FOR 15 MINUTES OR SO, IT WAS COMFORTING TO HEAR FAMILIAR VOICES BREAKING THROUGH THE DEAD SILENCE OF THE FOREST ON THE HANDY-TALKIE STRAPPED AROUND MY CHEST.

"NSCNG, ON STATION", "ROGER, NSCNG", "W5VMN, WE'VE ARRIVED", "ROGER, W5VMN", "WD5HQH, CHECKING IN", "ROGER, WD5HQH, THIS IS KB5PM, NET CONTROL, STANDING BY." STUMBLING OVER THE ROCKY TRAIL, TRYING TO AVOID THE SHEER DROP-OFF ON MY LEFT, I PICKED UP MY PACE IN ORDER TO MEET UP WITH MY PARTNER AT HIS (OUR) STATION.

"NSALS, THIS IS KB5PM...ARE YOU ON STATION YET, JERRY?"

"KB5PM, NSALS...NEGATIVE, DON. JUST PASSED MILEPOST 16. HOW MUCH FARTHER?" (PAUSE)...(SILENCE)...

"NSALS, KB5PM...JUST A LITTLE FARTHER, JERRY. CALL IN WHEN YOU GET THERE". "ROGER, NSALS, CLEAR."

MILEPOST 15! SWEAT WAS TICKLING MY WAIST AS IT RAN DOWN MY BACK AND CHEST. HMMMP! SOMEONE HAD MADE AN "X" WITH TWO STICKS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HIKING TRAIL! HOPE NONE OF THE SCOUTS STUMBLE AND HURT THEMSELVES...WATER ON MY LEFT, SHEER BLUFF ON MY RIGHT. BOY! SURE HATE TO THINK I'D HAVE TO CLIMB SOMETHING LIKE THAT! BETTER MOVE ON, TIME IS GETTING SHORT.....

ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES OF WALKING IN SEMI-DARKNESS. WATER THERMOS GETTING HEAVY. CAMPING STOOL BEGINNING TO RUB ON MY SHOULDER. TRAIL BECOMING HARD TO DISTINGUISH. SWEATING PROFUSELY, NOW. WONDER HOW MUCH FARTHER?

SCOUTS UP AHEAD. ONE STOPS AND WAITS FOR ME TO CATCH UP. "ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO FOLLOW US?" I FELT NAKED UNDER HIS SCRUTENIZING GLARE. "NO, I'M JUST WALKING AROUND OUT HERE," I SAID AS APOLOGETICALLY AS POSSIBLE. HE RAN OFF TO CATCH THE OTHERS, GLANCING BACK OVER HIS SHOULDERS SUSPICIOUSLY. I STOPPED AND WAITED UNTIL THEY WERE SWALLOWED UP BY THIS INFERNAL HIKING TRAIL.

CALLED IN TO NET CONTROL.....NO ANSWER.....SIGNAL CAN'T PENETRATE THESE SOLID ROCK MOUNTAINS SURROUNDING ME. KEEP WALKING...FLASHES OF AIR FORCE SURVIVAL TRAINING RUN THROUGH MY MIND.....

AHA! TWO MORE SCOUTS SITTING ON THE TRAIL, OBVIOUSLY AWAITING MY ARRIVAL. "SAY, MISTER, YOU KNOW WHERE 'BAKER-NORTH' IS?" WANTING TO KEEP MY POISE AS AN ADULT, I CLEARED MY THROAT AND SAID IN MY DEEPEST-SOUNDING VOICE, "SON, YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO LOOK FOR THE RAIL SIGNS." LOOKING AT ME IN TOTAL DISGUST, THE TWO SCOUTS FORGED ONWARD, LEAVING ME THE SOLE CUSTODIAN FOR THIS GIGANTIC FOREST.

WHY DO HIKING TRAILS ALWAYS HAVE TO GO UP AND DOWN? WHY DOESN'T SOMEONE INVENT A FLAT, SMOOTH ONE?

MILEPOST 14!! LEGS BEGINNING TO GET NUMB. (MENTAL NOTE: COWBOY BOOTS NO GOOD FOR HIKING!) "KB5PM, N5ALS...NO CONTACT ON 'BAKER-NORTH' YET. I'M AT MILEPOST 14. WHERE IS THAT COTTON-PICKER?"

"N5ALS, KB5PM...(SNICKER TRANSMITTED VERY WELL ON THIS RIG) IT'S BACK AT MILEPOST 15. YOU MISSED IT. CALL BACK IN WHEN YOU GET THERE." "KB5PM, W5SHQH...DON, I THINK WE SHOULD AWARD N5ALS THE PATHFINDER AWARD, DON'T YOU?" "YES, BOB, (SNICKER, AGAIN) THE ONE THAT HAS THE COMPASS WITH THE BROKEN NEEDLE!"

GRITTING MY TEETH, SHIFTING THE CAMPING STOOL TO OTHER SHOULDER, DEBATING WHETHER OR NOT TO ABANDON MY THERMOS, I TRUDGED BACK UP THE TRAIL THINKING UP DELIGHTFUL PHYSICAL TORTURES FOR W5SHQH.....

AT LONG LAST, THE FAMILIAR MILEPOST 15! THE "X" STILL IN THE PATH. OKAY, PLAY LIKE AN INDIAN...LOOK AROUND...WATER ON ONE SIDE, SHEER BLUFF ON THE...AHA! MID-WAY UP THE MOUNTAIN, A FORKED BRANCH WITH A LIMB THROUGH THE MIDDLE, POINTING SKYWARD. WITH FADING HOPES, I RATIONALIZED THAT WOOD DOESN'T NORMALLY GROW LIKE THAT. IT'S A SIGN, AND NO DOUBT IT WASN'T LEFT THERE BY GERONIMO.....GULPING, SWEAT BEGGING INTO MY EYES AS I LOOKED UPWARD, WITH SINKING HEART I KNEW THAT SHELDON, DRAPED IN HIS AMBITIONS OF EQUALING FEATS DONE BY DANIEL BOONE, WAS PATIENTLY AWAITING ME ON TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN.....

RISKING LIFE AND LIMB, ANALYZING MY LIFE AS IT FLASHED BEFORE MY EYES, I LABORED UP THE 100 FOOT HIGH CLIFF. ("NEVER LOOK DOWN", AS THEY SAY IN THE MOVIES!) SLITHERING OVER THE CREST OF THE HILL, BATHED IN SWEAT, I CAME FACE TO FACE WITH SHELDON...AND STATION 'BAKER-NORTH'!

(PANTING) "KB5PM, N5ALS...HAVE MADE CONTACT (GASP)...WITH 'BAKER-NORTH'."

"N5ALS, KB5PM...THAT'S FINE, JERRY. ALL THE SCOUTS ARE THROUGH THAT AREA NOW, SO YOU CAN CLOSE THAT STATION AND HEAD BACK....."

N5ALS

