

## A Year in the Life of a Direct Service Council Troop

Troop 12 is a Direct Service Council Troop located in Shanghai, Peoples Republic of China consisting of 35 Scouts. The Troop is sponsored by the Shanghai American School (SAS) and draws boys with families from twelve different countries (the United States, Israel, Germany, France, China, Hong Kong (SAR), Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, England, and Taiwan (Province). The Boys come from five different schools in the area; Shanghai American School (SAS), Shanghai International School (SIS), Shanghai Chinese International School (SCIS), Shanghai French & German School, & Concordia International School (CISS). The schools stand roughly in a strait line across the 20 mile wide Shanghai Metro Area.

Scouting in Shanghai, is a bit different than in the states. Shanghai Scouting has had a long history and international flavor for American Scouts. Dating from membership in Baden Powell's Boys Brigade in 1909 –“The Dragon Scouts” later became a registered BSA Troop from 1911 until 1949. The BSA Troop interacted with a large International and Chinese Scout Program here in Shanghai. The current Chinese government replaced the Scout program with a Young Pioneers, and Communist Youth League in 1950. The Communist Youth League activity that is still organized operates from all Chinese Schools. By Chinese law the BSA program is only open to foreign (non Chinese citizen) passport holders.

BSA Scouting in Shanghai enjoyed its rebirth in 1997 with the help of many dedicated American families, like the Dickens's, Wheeler's, Torrealba's, Keaty's, Keefe's and XXXX. The new Troop grew to about 15 boys from the American School. During the spring of 2001, the boy and adult leadership changed due to the continuing cycle of family repatriation. This is an all too common problem that is hard to plan for as companies that the adults work in, can makes life altering changes on a whim. Two of the participating parents: Dave Poppell and Jim Horak took the positions of Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster. Jim had been a Scout in Troop 906, Hawthorne, California. He had also been a Committee Member with Troop 1478 in Warren, Michigan. Dave had been an Indian Guide leader in Orange County, California. And can you believe this? Both had been Police Explorers in the Fountain Valley Police Department Post 1007: Jim from 1974-1976, Dave from 1979 - 1981. How cool is that?

Starting at the April 2001 outing, the two began to look at creating a two to three year program cycle to:

- Maintain the troop enrollment,
- Increase the older boy participation,
- Implement the boy led troop concept, and
- Allow an easily repeated program with interesting outing destinations.

The multinational and markedly Asian make up of the troop led to some different assumptions when scheduling the annual program. Most families are in Shanghai on a temporary basis, often a 2 to 5 year contract. The parents on the whole are passionately focused on their children's academic achievement. Most dads travel (a lot for business). The yearly calendar is impacted by U.S Holidays, traditional Chinese Holidays, religious holidays (Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim) and official Chinese Government

holidays. Plus a school schedule full of sports and other activities, really competes for time. English is the predominant language at most outings; however Arabic, Hebrew, French, German and Chinese are often heard. With so many of these factors to put in place, Jim and Dave held exit interviews with the scouts who were not planning to return for the 2001 / 2002 school year. The non-returnees had a variety of reasons for moving on:

- heavy academic load at school,
- school sports involvement,
- repetitive campsites becoming boring,
- cold, and mud.

The Scoutmasters met with the Troop Committee for approval and began to put in place a schedule that would refocus on local opportunities and facilities. They proposed a program that would attempt to fit the BSA program into the opportunities that Shanghai presented.

First, a focus on core scouting skills; youth leadership, camping, and advancement opportunities (most of the scouts were sixth & seventh graders at the Scout and Tenderfoot rank).

The second goal was that most events would be planned no further than one hour from the city center. This would allow the boys to come late or leave early to allow family, school, or sports participation.

The third focus would showcase Shanghai's institutions and facilities (as a troop would be able to do in the US).

The annual plan was presented to the troop committee in early September and was approved with smiles of surprise by most parents.

An additional challenge was that camping equipment and campsites are a relatively new concept in China. In fact, groomed campsites (as in State or National parks) don't exist as we know and love them in the United States. The troop must bring all equipment necessary to support a camp. Usually the only facilities that are found in a typical park are a basic squat toilet rest room. The 44-year heritage of camping experience from Troop 1478 in Michigan was put to use by Jim Horak and his son, First Class Scout Joe Horak. 2001 /2002 was to be an experimental year as they attempted to match available equipment to the needs for a utility value, portability, and cost. As tents require significant drying out for almost every outing due the frequent rains, this responsibility was left on an individual basis to a scout, their family, and their patrol "tent buddy".

After the airline tragedy's in Pennsylvania, New York and the Pentagon, when American patriotism was at a high level for Americans the world over and in the United States, American flags were becoming increasingly hard to come by and expensive as well. Boy Scout Troop 969 donated over 100 flags to Americans in Oregon, California, Colorado, Hawaii and Alabama. This was done, as a continuing fulfillment of our promise "...to do our best, in doing our duty to God and our country..."

Late September saw the troop at the Dian Shan Lake Youth League Camp for a basic skills camp out. New troop equipment, tarps, tables, saws, axes, menu plans, stools and campsite planning were introduced. The special surprise was that we had found a private .22 rifle range close to the camp. As there are "zero" firearms ownership in China, many

of the sixteen attending Scouts received, safety, rifle handling, and marksmanship instruction for the first time in their lives. The Troop held a memorial flag ceremony to remember September 11 and flew Old Glory at half mast for the duration of the weekend at the Youth League site. The troop was also visited by Shanghai Youth League Officials, who inspected the campsite to look at the BSA program. The Officials were amazed that the adults were actually letting the scouts cook meals; this just isn't done with children in Shanghai. It is believed that the children are too young and cannot handle that kind of responsibility. The boys had time for grasshopper hunting, campfire activities, Frisbee, soccer and building a mess tent by lashing bamboo poles and a tarp. This was a first for this troop and would prove to be quite prudent for our experiences in the future.

October brought the Troop out for a 35 Kilometer bike hike from their new campsite at Concordia International School in Pu Dong. The Troop cycled to the Gao Qiao Veterans Cemetery, down the battle field and retreat route of the Tai Ping Heavenly Warriors Army to claim the Historic Trails Award. The staff at the Veterans Cemetery enthusiastically welcomed the 30 Scouts and Parents with a personalized tour of the cemetery, reception hall, museum, and sculpture studio. The resident sculptor was working on a patriotic statue to be used in a bronze casting and answered many questions on his works. From Gao Qiao the Scouts cycled a short distance to the Tai Ping Memorial National Historic Site. This is the site where Christian inspired Chinese Tai Ping warriors from Nanjing led a revolt against the European business backed mercenaries in Shanghai. The warriors wanted to stop all of the corruption, gambling, crime and prostitution that were rampant at the time. They also wanted to establish their own government to keep this sort of thing from happening again. The Tai Ping warriors were slaughtered at this site in three feet of snow, in 1862. Oh well, so much for good intentions. It is interesting to know that the Communist government thinks of these martyrs as their founding fathers. At this site the Troop received a short historical lecture before completing the last 17 kilometers of their way home. Upon return to Concordia the scouts hosted Concordia's Webelos Den for an overnight and Junior Girl Scout Troop for dinner. After a long awaited campfire there was not much noise as the tired scouts dropped off to sleep. Sunday brought advancement work and breaking camp in the early afternoon.

November brought the Troop to Song Jiang Square Pagoda Park. Scoutmaster Dave was able to convince the park staff to allow the Scouts to camp at this ancient site. Often times we get turned down more than we get invited to camp. One of the difficulties here in China, is that you need permission to do most anything. It can be frustrating for Americans who are used to the freedom of planning, reserving and going, without a second thought. Our Scout leaders and committee members definitely push the envelope here. The Pagoda and Township was celebrating their 1,250th anniversary. We believe we were the first troop (1909 – 1949, 1997 – 2001) to ever to camp out there. While the camp out was fun, it rained for the entire weekend. A Bear Den of seven Cubs camped overnight on Friday. What a bunch of squirrels, but Helen Jin, the den mother, really had a good program for the younger boys. The next morning our troop was woken up by pensioners who come to the park at dawn, to exercise both body and voice. As we emerged from our tents we found that the pensioners surrounded us, they laughed once they saw it was foreigners coming out of the tents. This was another opportunity for the boys to explain who we are and what we do as scouts. The older "8th grade" scouts began

to take an increased role in troop organization. The scouts worked on Tenderfoot through 1st Class requirements. The park's botanical garden was opened, and new Assistant Scoutmaster Charles Xue conducted an in-depth tour. Mr. Xue – an accomplished chef and botanist, conducted a huge fry up and cooking class for Saturday's Dinner. On Sunday the Scouts attended an acrobatic show in the park arena and broke camp on Sunday Afternoon. The troop began a tradition of "neckerchiefing", presenting a troop neckerchief to our host, in this case the park manager.

December is usually a difficult month due to most Expatriates; yearning for a touch of home and family, leave for the Christmas holidays. As usual there is a hectic school schedule too. The Troop planned out a half-day visit to the Shanghai Public Security Bureau (PSB) – Shanghai Police Department. As is our custom (not so lucky in other parts of China) the troop attended in uniform. The Troop was greeted and guided through this massive four-story building by Police Officer LiLi Ni and three Police "Explorers". The museum displays and collections covered 200 years of Police Science, Shanghai History, transportation evolution and fire safety. The troop finished the visit by neckerchiefing the hosts and was asked to return to assist with translations and as docents for tours with foreign groups. Yet another great service opportunity.

January brought wet and cold weather, plus the annual golf camp outing. The Troop camped out at Hang Hua park, near the site of the former historic Millington Scout camp (home of Shanghai's "International Scout" Jamboree's from the 1920's – 1949) and currently in the flight path of the Hong Qiao airport. The weather conspired with low temperatures to make the weekend wet, very muddy and miserable. The local district mayor and education bureau head insisted that we hire policemen to stay the weekend with us. Another ploy to gain some foreign cash? No, a couple of very wise people looking out for our safety. January is just before Chinese New Year and for some reason there tends to be more "petty crime" at this time of year (although Shanghai is probably the safest city we have ever been too, ever!). There was one guy who checked us out at 3 a.m., but the scoutmasters and the police scared him off. The troop pushed on to play 18 holes under the direction of Troop Committee Members Chong Tuck Lai, and David Chen, and spent three more hours that evening on the three story driving range near the camp. Sunday morning greeted the troop with frozen ground, and heavy frost, crunch, crunch. A tough weekend but some experienced scouts to match. This was an awesome test for the scouts and they all exceeded even their own expectations for dealing with weather, cooking, golfing and the coveted campfire.

February brought the troop back to Concordia School. This was to be an historic themed weekend. The weather, again, did not cooperate. It rained the whole weekend. The troop worked on the Citizenship in the World Merit Badge. The scouts viewed and discussed the very cool movie "Empire of the Sun". This film showed the life of another boy of 12 (eerily similar to our own) who survived the Japanese occupation of Shanghai from 1937 – 1945. The troop went to the Peoples Liberation Army Navy Museum in the Bao Shan District. The scouts had a great time, drying out, climbing the exhibits, firing missiles (in the mock firing center) and asking questions to the Navy Sailor who guided the troop through the museum (First Class Scout Steven Xue translating). From here the troop went to the Wu Song Fort Park and ate a bag lunch in the park. From the park the troop walked to the Anti-Japanese War of Aggression Museum and viewed the dioramas, and exhibits. Of particular interest was the memorial display set up to honor five Chinese Boy Scouts,

four of whom gave their lives helping, retrieving and treating wounded Chinese soldiers and civilians during the defense of Shanghai from the Japanese Imperial Army. The day finished with a warm dinner and campfire back at Concordia. In spite of the weather, the food continued to get better as the cooking experience and patrol leadership showed great improvements over previous camp outings. The troop broke a very wet and muddy camp at noontime on Sunday.

March saw the first of schedule conflicts arise where the planned camp outing could not happen due to the busy school schedules. In years past we had missed big chunks of our program because the leaders would try to accommodate everyone. The current scout leaders and committee members decided that we would set a schedule and whoever could make the events and campouts could make them; whoever could not, could not. We decided to plan enough programs so that if a few were missed, the boys could still have a chance to fulfill their requirements for rank advancements and school obligations. This proved to work well for all.

The troop was in water during April at the Cypress Hotel's indoor heated pool, to participate in the annual swim qualification. One fact quickly came out was that almost all the boys had extensive swim training. We did however have two scouts who were very timid about getting in the water over their heads. With patience, they learned to swim well, inflate their clothes, float and get their hair wet. Mr. Horak used his Marine Corps training to teach the scouts great swimming and floating skills, while Mr. Poppell and Mr. Xue assisted him in working with all scouts to finish the swim requirements for their rank advancement. With the helpful guidance of former competition swimmer Helen Jin, 10 of the eligible scouts successfully completed the Swimming Merit Badge. May brought the Troop's planned big event – Dong Ping National Park on Chong Ming Island. Chong Ming Island is the third largest island in China, after Taiwan and Hainan. It is the largest silt island in the world, located in the mouth of the Yangtze River just north of Shanghai. The trip was longer than most of our previous outings and involved traveling by car, ferry and bus before we finally got to the pristine forests of Dong Ping National Forest Park. In 1951 the Shanghai government relocated about 200,000 people to this uninhabited island and told them to make it work. So they began by planting pine trees and they made forests, with trees planted one meter apart. It is a little strange to walk through that kind of forest.

In this forest park the scouts worked on having a lot of fun with their boomerang throwing, rock climbing, race carting, paint ball, crab and toad hunting. All of the rest of the camping chores had become routine and expected by all. Setting up the mess tent, now took less than 15 minutes. The scouts marked off the tent line and set up the tents. The fire drum was marked off a safe distance from the tents, the wood was stowed; cooking gear unloaded and set up without any hassles. All without the scout leaders having to tell the scouts what to do and when.

The scouts had really pulled together as a troop and learned how to take care of themselves, have fun and respect and enjoy the outdoors and each other. The troop was beginning to function as one.