

THIS TROOP INVENTS TROUBLE

by Keith Monroe

One Monday evening last May, serious emergencies occurred all over Santa Monica, California. At the site of each incident, Boy Scouts appeared on the scene, ready to offer needed assistance to seriously injured victims.

- On 23rd Street, a car was crunched against a tree, its driver apparently deep in shock.
- In a smoke-darkened basement on 15th Street, Scout searchers found helpless people on the stairs.
- On a side street, a bicyclist and skater lay in a welter of blood.
- In a residential backyard, a broken wire was spraying sparks; a fallen roofer's leg waws impaled on a stake.
- Sitting beside a chainsaw, a dazed and bleeding man showed Scouts his severed thumb.
- A robbery victim lay on a doorstep with a knife protruding from his chest.

Nine different scenes were rife with broken bones, blood-spurting gashes, pink burns, and blue bruises.

Hysterical spectators waved and pointed. Victims and bystanders clamored for Scouts to take charge.

They did so, scuttling from place to place as directed by telephone dispatchers. Despite their ordeals, all victims were unhurt. Their injuries were faked. It was "Bloody Monday," the superrealistic first-aid experience staged every few years by Santa Monica's Troop 2.

The fakery called for "victims" to utilize strenuous theatrics. And because the Scouts responded to each emergency by patrols, the victims' elaborate makeup had to be renewed each time a patrol finished and hastened away to some other trouble spot. The teams of actors (who were neighbors, relatives, and friends of Scouts) played out their dramas six times between 6 and 8:30 p.m.

The evening was the climax of secret plans set in motion months earlier by a task force of parents in Troop 2. Arrangements took shape smoothly because many of the parents had helped plot similar melodramatics once or twice before.

Troop 2 has faced a "Bloody Monday" about every third year since 1950. No advance warning is given to Scouts. Suddenly a mobilization call goes out at 5:30 p.m. on a Monday, the troop's meeting night. Patrols muster quickly with first-aid supplies and are sent to various locations where they cope with whatever they find. Judges stand by to score their performance and debrief them afterward.

Scouts sense when the long-planned night is approaching. "Will there be a Bloody Monday this year?" they'll ask Scoutmaster Steve Marcy, and he may respond: "There's no telling. Be ready." In spring, as days lengthen and give scope for outdoor action, suspense tightens. Any Monday may be the big one. Patrols drill harder on first aid and emergency techniques.

Smoke, Darkness, Yelling

Suspicion that a Bloody Monday may impend is a powerful stimulus to practice. Troop leaders and parents have noticed this over the years. It's the main reason why planners take pains to make the events as shocking as possible, with problems besetting Scouts on all sides amid

smoke and darkness and yelling, so that everyone will remember for years and look forward to another one. Scouts get almost as much benefit from preparing for Bloody Monday as from going through it.

The first Bloody Monday was part of a troop meeting. A few Cub Scouts in old clothes were persuaded to lie around the school grounds where the troop met. They pretended to be in pain, and a few were daubed with ketchup to signify wounds. Patrols hustled from one sufferer to the next, obviously relishing the rapid action. Leaders felt encouraged to stage similar but more complex surprises.

As the troop grew and more parents became active, fathers who were physicians undertook to plan thoroughly realistic exercises. They talked at parents' meetings, showed pictures of past Bloody Mondays, asked for volunteers, and phoned around with personal requests.

By the late 1960s, with eight patrols in the troop, nine disaster sites were customary (to make it easier to shift patrols without gridlock.) Parents who thought up the scenarios kept striving to outdo past efforts.

BSA literature gave ideas for homemade imitations of injuries, such as using morticians' wax and broken chicken bones to look like compound fractures; various kinds of cosmetics for the pallor of deep shock or the ugly colors of burns and bruises; hidden tubes and syringes for spurting arterial wounds. Parents invented attachments that looked like knives or stakes driven into flesh.

Red Jello and Raspberry Soda

One troop dad, Dr. Eric Fonkalsrud, a faculty member at UCLA medical school, noticed in a medical journal news about a company that supplied the Army with casts and molds of truly ugly injuries for training ambulance corpsmen. He bought some, and they have been reused in Bloody Mondays for a quarter century now. They include protruding intestines, sagging eyeballs, a facsimile of badly burned flesh, and eight other grisley fixtures.

Imitation blood sold by theatrical companies isn't used in Bloody Monday because it leaves stains. Instead, the troop uses red Jello for clotting blood and raspberry soft drinks for flowing blood.

In theory, after Scouts have found themselves in imitation emergencies, they should react better to real ones. Make-believe can steel them to the sight of bad injuries.

This is no longer just a theory for Troop 2. Having kept in touch with many alumni throughout the decades, the troop has letters and eyewitness reports from former members who suddenly faced life-or-death emergencies and quickly did what was needed. In all, Troop 2 counts a remarkable 47 lives saved since 1950.

"I Knew What to Do"

A dramatic example occurred one Sunday in 1990. John Christian, an Eagle Scout and former patrol leader, rounded a turn in the Pacific Coast Highway to see seven cars in a deadly tangle, wheels still spinning.

A drunk driver had caused a pileup. People were thrown through windshields, limbs severed, blood everywhere. Christian pulled a first-aid kit from his car and went to work. Officers said later that four people would have died if he hadn't acted fast.

Christian told the troop, "Because of the three Bloody Mondays I've been through, I knew what to do and the blood didn't bother me so much."

Hearing these reports, Santa Monica's police and fire departments have pitched in to help. By prearrangement they send crews to add realism at certain sites and to give expert comments afterward. An automobile towing service also provides help, putting a wrecked car at a designated scene each Bloody Monday.

In 1971 the authorities at Santa Monica Hospital, realizing that the injuries the troop simulated could test its own ability to cope with a major disaster, suggested that the troop move all the bandaged "victims" to the hospital's emergency entrance at the completion of the drills.

This climax at the hospital, with nurses and doctors hurriedly shifting 40 incoming people to gurneys or wheelchairs, now adds a fillip to each Bloody Monday. Afterward Scouts and families are invited into the hospital cafeteria to consume refreshments and swap tales of the night's horrors.

Everyone agrees that Bloody Monday is a lot of work, but a lot of fun, too. And most worthwhile is preparing Scouts for real-life emergencies that they may encounter someday.