

THE HISTORY OF THE BOY SCOUT MOVEMENT AND UNFORGETTABLE REMINISCENCES IN

S. THOMAS' GURUTALAWA

By George Pillai



Dr. R. L. Hayman, the first Headmaster of S. Thomas' College, Gurutalawa was the founder of the Boy Scout Movement in this school. The October 1943 issue of the School Magazine carried the comment, "the Boy Scout Troop has been doing very well." In the second term of the same year the Troop was registered as "5th Badulla". Regular camps were held and hikes were planned in the neighboring wooded areas. Interest in the Movement was rapidly increasing with the scouts involving themselves wholeheartedly in work in the school campus. At this time, leveling operations on the school playing field began and the scouts spent most of their time assisting in hauling dirt.

On January 8th 1945 the entire Boarding establishment, temporarily housed in Peradeniya, moved to Gurutalawa. The scouts were also busy, preparing for their tests for Merit Badges, but, the absence of official examiners in the Badulla District kept several scouts from getting their First Class Badges. In January 1946, Mr. C.P. Andrews took over as Scoutmaster when Dr. Hayman went on furlough. Mr. C.H. Davidson was now in charge. On April 1st, 1946, the School had a wonderful surprise when Dr. and Mrs. Hayman paid their first visit to Gurutalawa, after their marriage. The Scouts welcomed them by staging an excellent concert performance, in their honor. In January 1948 Dr. Hayman as Headmaster, had the Boy Scout Troop registered as the "3rd Nuwar Eliya". The Scouts began to build a log hut of their own, in the area, by the fence, below the road to Boralanda. As the numbers increased, a separate Junior Troop was formed. The latter group was working harder and overtaking the seniors in the matter of Scout Tests. Mr. H.O. Wijegoonewardene and Mr. J.A. Thomas assisted in the running of the troops. The School campus attracted Scouts from other Troops and in June 1948, Mr. Kingsley Dassanaik and Mr. Henry Paul visited with the scouts from the Deaf & Blind School, Ratmalana. They camped out on our grounds.

On November 3rd, 1948 the school encountered its first major disaster when a wildfire totally gutted the classroom block. Building started anew with both troops heavily involved in the work. Once again another Scout Log cabin was

under construction. Strangely enough, timber was in short supply at this time. The scouts laid a stone foundation, but, it was sited in an unfortunate position and had to be abandoned. In 1950, the Junior Scout troop increased in number. It was divided into Section A (Seniors) and Section B (sub-juniors). The founder Patrol Leaders of the Sub-Junior troop were: S.Jayatilleke (Hornbills), P.Ondaatje (Elephants), and J.Silva (Ash Doves).

In April 1950, Dr. & Mrs. Hayman went on furlough. Mr. A.R.W. Tennekoon took over the Senior troop. The Sub-juniors were in charge of Mr.J.L. Habaragoda, R.B. Wijekoon and Mr. P.S. Duleep Kumar. The year 1950 was quite eventful for the Troops. The Senior Troop Leader, M.A. de Silva had the unique distinction of receiving the King's Scout Badge and Parchment, from the Governor General of Ceylon. When Dr. & Mrs. Hayman returned, there were three troops functioning separately. In 1951, the Australian Scouts, on their way to attend The Jamboree, visited Gurutalawa and camped by the classroom block. In the evening Dr. Hayman entertained them to a film show depicting wild life in Yala and Wilpattu. In 1952, Mr. A.R.W. Tennekoon and Mr. J.L.Habaragoda left the School. Col. John Skinner Wilson, C.M.G., O.B.E., Director, Boy Scouts International Bureau visited. Two Senior Scouts received their "Venture" Badges from him. In 1953, all three troops worked together with Dr. Hayman. In January 1954, Mr. George Pillai joined the staff and on 31st January, he took over the Sub-junior troop with Mr. W.D. Fernando as Assistant.

On March 28th, 1954 the Sub-junior troop hiked to Mirahawatte Fruit Farm and camped there. The Patrol Leaders were, N.S. Heenatigala, I. Cassim, T.Stirzaker and S. Sri Kantha. Dr. Hayman, as G.S.M. visited the camp and invested the following: S. Sri Kantha, A. Amirthalingam, N.S.Heenatigala, A. Conderlag, A. Gunasena, I. Cassim, T. Stirzaker, A.P.Jayasinghe, K. Muttiah, R. Oliver, S. Pakir Saibo and S.S.H. Young. This was altogether a great year. Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh spent three days in Nuwara Eliya. On the 15th of April the Scouts were in Nuwara Eliya to assist at the Civic Reception to her Majesty and on the 18th, in the Guard of Honor, at the tree planting ceremony in the Nuwara Eliya Park. I still remember the surprised look on the Queen's face when she spotted Dr. Hayman in Scout uniform.

At about this time, I had a strange feeling that something I had achieved in St. Sylvester's College, Kandy had become known. Some senior students made a habit of waylaying me and one day, Elmo William blurted out, "Sir, will you become our Boxing coach". I was taken aback and looking at the eager faces of Nanda Mathew, B. Munasinghe and A. Gunasena standing beside Elmo William, I could not refuse. They took me behind the Headmaster's bungalow and I saw the boxing ring – in a clearing – just four posts, three rows of stout ropes and the expectant faces of those waiting to be trained. The only other equipment was a medicine ball and many pairs of gloves. How we progressed to achieve the highest ranking in boxing history in the school, is another chapter in the history of the school.

To begin, we had to have a proper boxing ring. I chipped in and had a platform built. A. Gunasena donated the canvas sheet and padding. All Ceylon boxers, K.Edwin, Albert Perera and Alex Obeysekera joined me and we went through some rigorous training. Elmo William, B. Munasinghe, Nanda Mathew, A. Gunasena, N.L.Fernando, U.Jayawardena, Henry William, Kingsley William, Zubair Caffoor, M.S.Marikar Bawa, G.A.D.Anandapala, U.Jayasuriya, J.J.Ratnaveera, A.Samarasinghe, T.Dharmapala, Evin Mohamed, Nihal Nilaweera, A.H.M.Razeek, K.Upatissa and Patrick Pillai, were the backbone, and all won their bouts. As a team, we were defeated twice by St. Sylvester's College, Kandy. We had memorable victories over Carey College – M.S.Marikar Bawa will remember his fight-, St. Michael's, Polwatte and Royal College, Colombo. Incidentally, Royal College Colombo had won the Stubbs' Shield that year. We invited the team to Gurutalawa and had the honor of beating them. N.L.Fernando, Patrick Pillai, U.Jayawardena and Kingsley William displayed exceptional style and won their bouts and the Shield for the school.

On June 4th 1954, Mr. A.R. Cutler, the High Commissioner for Australia, in Ceylon visited the school. On 27th June, the troop hiked to Rahangalla. On the 30th of July we hiked to Bindunuwewa. More scouts were invested- M.R.A. Azeez, A.N. Perkins, M.H.D.Perera, M.Rode, A. Miranda, E.Callender and M. Kennedy. A. Gunasena received his Second Class Badge. On 28th November, 1954 Dr. & Mrs. Hayman left on furlough. The Sub-Junior troop entertained them the previous day and M.R.Kelaart wished them a pleasant journey and a speedy return. Canon A.J. Foster and Capt. G. C. Harper were now in charge. In 1955 we hiked to the Horton Plains, Diyatalawa, Idalgashena, Totupola, Kirigalpota and Ohiya. The first ever camp in Pedro was for four days in March, 1955. The troop travelled to Arugam Bay in March 1959. C.Van Cuylenburg had requested his parents to obtain permits to camp in Dagenham Bungalow. One incident in camp is worth recording. Kingsley William got into difficulties in the sea in Arugam Bay. Brave and timely action by C.S.B.Herath, M.de Fonseka, L.M.R. Gunawardena, S. Shanmuganathan, C.Kannangara and P.Saturninus turned what was going to be a tragedy into a heroic rescue.

Canon Foster requested me to take over coaching the Under 14 Cricket and Soccer teams. Notable cricketers were A. Medonza, wicket keeper and opening batsman, M.Kennedy, Captain and off-spin bowler, E. Callender, right arm, medium pace swing bowler and P. Ondaatje, opening batsman, leg spin bowler and the team's run-machine. S. Watawala had a flowing back-lift and went in one-down. Later on, we had A.A.de Silva, a prolific scorer with a penchant for smothering every short ball he faced. Among the schools we played against that year, St. Anthony's College, Kandy had a good team. The match was played on our grounds. We won the toss and batted and made 143 runs. The Antonians had reached 140 runs. Michael Joseph, who came in one-down was at the striker's end. Ondaatje was the bowler. Michael hooked off the back foot and the ball soared towards the boundary, but, P. Kotelawala was right under and he held the catch.

Soccer was played in Nuwara Eliya, Radella, Colombo, Kandy and also on our grounds. In the match against the Hill School on our grounds, a mighty kick by A. Ballingall knocked down the goal posts and we abandoned the match. The teams enjoyed the tea and snacks provided by our matron. G.A.D. Anandapala, Pakir Saibo, M. U. Liyanage, Stanley Perera and W.A. Puspakumara come easily to my mind. The team loved to travel to Radella to play the Hill School. A huge tea with cakes and cookies was laid out and our team enjoyed the game and the tea.

The Sub-junior troop had the honor of being selected to participate in the Ceylon Golden Jubilee Jamboree from February 26th to March 3rd, 1962 at the Colombo Race Course. There were three Pre-Jamboree Training Camps. The third Camp was held in Gonapitiya Estate, Kandapola. Scouts, R.J.Dobbs, A.G.Sahabandu, T.R.Bridge, V.B.Ratnayake, H.D. Wickrematilleke, J. Junaid, S. Jayasinghe, D.C. Kannangara, W.U.K. Fernando, W.M.Fernando, M.Z. Hameen, M.B. Ratnayake, M. Rajagopal, J.J. Rajakaruna, G. Goodacre, W. Ramanujan, T. Suby and R. Amerasinghe were selected to attend. The opening ceremony saw Sir Cyril de Zoyza, Chairman of the Scout Council of Ceylon, the Hon. Maitripala Senanayake, representing the Prime Minister, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, Governor General and Chief Scout of Ceylon, the Hon. Badi-ud-din Mahmud, Minister of Education and Mr. E. W. Kannangara, Chief Scout Commissioner.

Every year, the scout troop camped in Pedro, Nuwara Eliya. "ENTER HEREIN ALL THOSE WHO LOVE THE GREAT OUTDOORS" was blazed out on the huge log hewn gateway. In October, five Patrol Leaders, R.J.Dobbs, A.Sahabandu, T.R.Bridge, D.C.Kannangara, and M.U.Liyanage were in charge. We climbed Pidurutalagala on a misty morning. Mr. A.E.Q. Helling, Deputy District Commissioner, Nuwara Eliya visited. The following were invested: K.K.Meegahawatte, L.H.S. de Silva, A. Aranwala, B. Kodituwakku, A. K. Vithanage, S. Kotagama and D.A.W. Ratnasekera. The Cook's Badge was awarded to W.M.Fernando and N.G. Wijeratne became a Second Class Scout.

In February 1963, the troop arranged their “farewell” camp to Dr. Hayman, in the Yala Sanctuary. Mr. Rajakaruna was our host in Bundala. Before reaching Palatupana, Mr. Sellahewa entertained us to lunch. When returning, Mr. Devaraja gave us breakfast in the Tissamaharama rest House. We reached Rosebury Estate where Mr. R.G.W.Nilaweera had laid out a lavish spread. This is always done whenever we pass through Koslanda. Dr. Hayman wrote in my logbook. “ I have enjoyed my camp with the Junior troop and always been fed sumptuously. I wish its members good scouting and good camping. They must aim to make their own the true scout spirit in all things. I look forward to having good news of their achievements.”

On March 14, 1963, the Sub-junior troop provided a Guard-of-Honor to Dr. and Mrs. Hayman at the main gate, to bid farewell. T. Suby, M.U. Liyanage, W. M.Fernando, A. Aranwela, S. P. Liyanage, L.H.S.de Silva, A. Kotalawala, K.K.Meegahawatte, K.Kodituwakku, K.Nilaweera, P.P.Rajapakse, S.W.Wickramasooriya, H.T. de Silva, J.Nagendran, S. Kotagama, K. Banagala, S.Sri Kumar, S.Sukumar, P. Muttiah, K.Ratnasekera, P.B.R.Perera, A.B.Siriwardene, W.G.Ratnasiri, D.H.Chandralal, T.B.Werapitiya, K. Balakumar and N.Ratnasekera attended. A chapter in the history of the Scout Movement in Gurutalawa ended.

True to Dr. Hayman’s note in my logbook the troop was busy preparing for their tests for Merit Badges. In October 1963 we camped in Talawakelle. We were guests of Mr. L. Wickremasooriya, the father of Wimalanath, one of the Patrol Leaders. We travelled by train and were transported by truck to his residence. The weather being kind, we pitched our tents and delighted in the generosity and hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Wickremasooriya. February 1964, saw us in Pedro Camp. In March 1964 we camped in Yala. Mr. A.E.Q. Helling accompanied us. Again, we were guests of Mr. & Mrs. Nilaweera at Koslanda. We had dinner and stayed the night. Mr. Devaraja and Mr. Sellahewa met us in Tissamaharama and laid out a delicious lunch followed by the traditional Curds and treacle. On the return journey, Mr. Devaraja and Mr. Sellahewa hosted breakfast. The last stop on this eventful trip was at Rosebury Estate, Koslanda. We lunched with Mr. and Mrs. Nilaweera.

The Scout troops have continued to maintain excellent standards and in 1983 the troops recorded the largest number of First Class Scouts. Today, we can look back with pride on the legacy left behind by Dr. and Mrs. Hayman.