

Los Angeles Times

Monday, July 23, 2018

By Hillary Davis

Sixty-five years ago last week, 50,000 Boy Scouts from all of the then-48 states, plus the Alaska and Hawaii territories and 26 other countries, erected a tent city for a national jamboree on what was once a swath of the expansive Irvine Ranch in Newport Beach.

On Thursday, about 20 came back.

The jamboree — essentially a big camp — drew young boys who have since become grandfathers and great-grandfathers, but who can still recite the Scout Oath and still salute the flag with their right hand at their temple, palm out, thumb holding down the pinky.

The 65th-anniversary reunion was a celebration of Newport history. This was the Jamboree that gave Jamboree Road its name, forged from an 8-mile gravel road that Irvine Co. graded to help Scout troops reach the site at what is now Fashion Island shopping center.

Bill McCroskey, 78, brought the sand-colored canvas ridgepole wall tent he'd slept in during the 10-day jamboree. On Thursday, he pitched it on a grassy patch in the shadow of a Macy's department store.

He had received the tent brand-new at the start of the jamboree, which he attended with his troop from Santa Monica. He shared it with a boy named Joe. The tent, still crisp and sturdy, is usually carefully stored at his son Bill Jr.'s house in Tustin. Bill Jr., who also was at the reunion, understands the sentimental value — he was a Scout too, as is his son, Jack.

The elder Bill, who now lives in Huntington Beach, remembers the jamboree's closing show in an arena at what is now Corona del Mar High School.

"We were so far up the hill, the people on the stage were about this tall," he said, holding his thumb and forefinger an inch apart. "It was like looking down on Orange County from an airplane."

Bob Ludekens, 87, went in uniform Thursday.

In 1953, he was a 22-year-old Scout master out of Westwood. He was young for a Scout master, but well-seasoned. A Scout since his 12th birthday, he was promoted to lead his troop at 14. That was in 1944, when fathers who would have filled the role were in short supply because they were fighting in World War II.

Ludekens took 36 boys to the jamboree. They spent part of the week in quarantine on orders of the county health department after one boy showed polio-like symptoms. It turned out it wasn't polio, but a wicked flu-like virus that sidelined several boys until it passed after a couple of days. The boys still managed to have a good time and went home healthy, though Ludekens spent most of his time keeping an eye on sick kids.

Ludekens never left Scout leadership. He said he found it to be his calling.

He appeared in one of Norman Rockwell's 1940s Scout paintings as a young uniformed man pointing to the horizon. He attended the 1947 World Scout Jamboree in Moisson, France. In 1955, he helped stage a Scout show at the Los Angeles Coliseum under the supervision of Walt Disney. A scouting facility in Visalia, Calif., where he still volunteers, is named for him.



He's now in his 76th year of Scouting. The troop he started 57 years ago still exists, with 91 Cubs and 60 older Scouts. "As you can see, I've been very lucky," he said.

Dave Faessel, 77, brought his olive green uniform shirt, still bearing the numbers of Fullerton's Troop 27 on the sleeve, and a stack of glossy black-and-white photos from the 1953 extravaganza. He was 12 when he went to the campout and served as the camp cartoonist. As he flipped through the photos, with their crinkle-cut edges, he recalled the names of other boys with ease — Dick Combs. Vincent Flynn.

He remembered going to the beach, but not going in the water so as to avoid jellyfish.

Though Bill McCroskey didn't have to travel far for the jamboree, the spectacle was still an adventure. "I've done nothing like it before or since," he said.

Davis writes for the Daily Pilot.