

SPEECH DELIVERED BY RON SIMS (PLATTEVILLE)  
1967 WINTER O.A. BANQUET  
25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF WETASSA LODGE #227  
VFW HALL - BENTON, WI.

Opening Remarks

This situation reminds me somewhat of a story told by John Erskine in a past issue of Readers Digest. It goes something like this:

"Little Tommy, seated on his father's lap, was thumbing through the pages of an illustrated Bible, when suddenly he came upon a picture of Daniel about to enter the lion's den. Tommy was truly perplexed, for the picture portrayed Daniel all wreathed in smiles. To help him solve this dilemma, Tommy turned to his father with this all-important question. "Dad," he said, "I don't quite understand this picture. Here is Daniel, about to enter the lion's den, and he seems to be quite happy about it."

"Well, my son," came the reply, "That's probably because he realizes that when the feasting is over he won't be called upon to say anything."

I know what he meant after the fine meal we had this evening.

I hope what I have to say this evening doesn't fit this situation:

"The community dinner was over at last and the patient guests who had listened to the long address of the principal speaker breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"The Speaker was all right," the toastmaster's wife whispered, "but it seems to me that he didn't put enough fire into his speech."

"I feel the opposite way," answered the toastmaster. "In my opinion, he didn't put enough of his speech in the fire."

So you might say this leaves me in a quandry before I start. Should I light a fire with my speech or should I light a fire to my speech.

Really, I didn't come down here tonight to light any fires but just to talk straight talk about the Order of the Arrow.

About June of 1942, I first came in contact with the program of the Order of the Arrow in Canyon Camp. The Camp Director, Dick Lebitsamer, brought it into

the U. S. Grant Council and inducted the first group that year. I wish I could say that I was a charter member, but I can't. My induction came one year later.

The camp was a little different then than it is now. The camp area ended about where the road fords the stream. The land beyond was farmed by John Hess. John sort of looked after the camp as he passed through in his 1928 model car. Each year he brought his horses and mower down and mowed the parade grounds. Often we would borrow his dump rake to clear the mowed grass. Sometimes he would clear it for the hay.

The camp sites were all lined up along the base of the hill. Each site had its cook shack or fireplace and tents without platforms. We had to block the double deck cots with scrap lumber. The first group in camp usually got the job of whipping the camp site into shape for inspection, using sickles and rakes. Each troop that followed kept the site in shape.

Coon Creek provided the water for our 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  acre lake. There we had our swimming area around a "T" dock and diving raft straight out from the O.A. calling out area. Boating and canoeing, along with life saving, occupied the rest of the area.

The area where most of the present camp sites are located was a pasture area with a scattering of trees and some second growth. It was in this area that most of the inductees spent their lone vigil. I can remember one group that was taken out where the two "guides" became lost after dropping off the last inductee and ended up in Apple River. By the time they got back to camp it was time to start picking the boys up again. I figure they had more of an ordeal than the rest of the ordeal honor boys had that week.

We had no running water. If you wanted a drink you pumped it at the pump over on the other side of the swimming pool. If you wanted to shower, you went down over the dam where a pipe drained some of the lake through a shower head. Most of the camp relied upon soaking off the dirt during the swim period in water often so thick

with mud that you almost needed a spade to swim with.

The campfire circle was in a small clearing over by the chapel and later moved up on the hill where it is today. The chapel was an altar built into a small grove of trees near its present site.

The only permanent buildings were the Lodge and the nearby Health Lodge (office), the Rain and Shine Shelter which is now the mess hall. Only the round area without any cement floor or walls were there ~~there~~ then. The Trading Post was the last of the permanent buildings except for a few small cook shacks at the various sites. The mess hall was a large tent with screened sides which we erected in the area where the road cut across below the present pump site near the grove of large trees. A temporary cook shack was made in 1942 which provided a platform on which the stove and work tables were placed, all of which were covered by a 12 x 12 tent. The floor of the mess hall was grass for the first week or so and dirt or mud, depending on the weather, after that. All the water for drinking or washing dishes at the mess hall had to be pumped by hand and carried the same way. I recall one time we had ice cream for a treat. It would have to be a treat because we had to go to Stockton for extra ice and rock salt to use in the hand turned icecream maker. You see, the ice cream was home made. You haven't really lived until you have turned out ice cream for about 80 hungry campers. We had no electricity in the camp then.

The first calling out ceremony was held in the old campfire circle. One of the camp staff usually would place himself to the right of the candidate in the circle. The "Tapping" was done by a "brave" dancing around the circle to a "Tom-Tom." He would stop in front of the "candidate" and shoot an arrow into the ground at the feet of the candidate. We all expected someone to get an arrow in the foot but it never happened that I can remember. Two other braves would pull the candidate into the circle and all would follow the lead brave while he selected the rest of the candidates. After the tapping, the candidates were led away for

instructions and the campfire continued. The rest of the ordeal was about the same as it is today except for the places used for the campfire ceremonies.

The first induction campfire ceremonies were held up on the hill across the lake about straight across from the location of the swimming pool today. The candidates were taken blind-folded and placed in canoes (no mean task) and taken up and across the lake.

Later ceremonies were held across the ford and up the valley toward the farm at the base of a large white pine on the right side of the valley across the creek. This time the candidates had to ford the creek twice before the circle was reached.

Still later an O.A. Ceremonial Circle was established up the hill by the back road near what is "Lost Apache" campside today. There we erected the teepee and placed hand carved totem poles around the campfire area. This was the site of the first "Brotherhood" Honor Ceremony in which I received the Brotherhood Honor and later served as a member of the ritual team. I worked on the ritual team for several years as "Metu."

Many things have changed physically to Canyon Camp over the years. I would suspect a great deal of the changes have been brought about by the Order of the Arrow, and well they should have. If we are truly an Honor Camper Society, we should be prepared to carry the ideals of the society forward. It could be expected that such a society would bring about changes and improvements in the camp and to the camping program. I am sure to talk about the changes in the camp and in its program down through the intervening 25 years would take considerably more time than I have spent thus far. I am sure that there are many more changes and improvements which can be made, and again I am not going to try to be a fortune-teller and make any predictions.

I guess what it all boils down to is that the ideals of scouting as enriched by such a society as the Order of the Arrow has brought about great changes in our camp

and its program because men and boys believed in these ideals and put them to work. I am just as sure that these same ideals have been put to work by the members in their homes, their schools, their communities, and for the betterment of our nation and the world. I believe it took people with ideals such as those we promised to uphold in the O.A. ceremony to build the kind of country we have. And, in the years ahead, it will take the full dedication of each of us to these ideals to bring about the kind of world we would like to live in. The road isn't easy, but we found that out in the ordeal ceremony. The world we would like to have, we may never see, but if we pursue the ideals of scouting and of the Order of the Arrow we will help bring the day closer.