

**Troop 49 – The Pathfinders**  
**Albany, New York**  
April 18 & 19 2009

Boy Scout Troop 49 planned a long trip on the end of spring break. Most of the Troop left on Friday morning and drove up to Herkimer, NY to dig for diamonds then spent the night at a Boy Scout camp. The rest of us met at OLPH on Saturday morning and drove straight to the Saratoga Battlefield National Historical Park. We arrived at exactly 11:00 AM, 20 minutes ahead of schedule and the campers arrived a few minutes behind us. By 11:30 we were in the theater watching the 20 minute introductory video providing us a good overview of the battle and the actors involved. After the movie, we gathered on the patio of the visitor's center overlooking the battlefield. We broke into three groups to keep the load on the trail reasonable so all the high school Scouts with a few adults departed first. I reviewed some basic orienteering skills with the rest of the Scouts orienting them to the map and the landmarks. We identified a cell tower and smoke from a fire to the east as that was the general direction of our walk.

The middle school Scouts departed followed by the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Scouts and me a few minutes later. This was a good time for me to get to know these new Scouts and for them to get to know me. The Wilkinson Trail had a lot of stops with points of interest at each. The Scouts also had 48 questions to answer to earn the trail medal and patch. The skies were threatening rain but there was only a slight breeze and the temperature was perfect for a quick walk without overheating. During the early part of the walk we spotted a number of birds, the most exciting for me was the Pileated Woodpecker which I had only seen once before 5 years ago! The park had white posts outlining the corners of specific landmarks to help the visitors view the lay of the defense structures and the battle lines. I believe the Scouts truly got a feel for the closeness of the battle lines.

We walked through a mature pine forest and then onto the park drive to get to the overlook by the Hudson River and Champlain Canal. Here we ate lunch, took a few photos and didn't linger as it was starting to rain lightly. Tom told Colin a number of times to put on his rain gear but Colin was reluctant. I put on my poncho and told Colin that he needed to put his on as once he did, the rain gods would be satisfied and the rain would stop. Sure enough, he put on his rain coat and the rain stopped in a minute or too! We followed the road to other spots in the battlefield through fields and forest. The last mile brought the rain back at a gentle pace so we pushed harder returning to the visitor's center where the other Scouts were resting. After a quick pass through the gift shop, we were on our way at about 4 PM heading south to Albany to the USS Slater.

The Folkerts offered me a ride and Matt and I worked on his Communications and Citizenship in the Community merit badge during the car rides. He took advantage of the opportunity that I offered all the Scouts.

We were scheduled to arrive at the USS Slater at 5:00PM and arrived at 4:59, perfect timing. I worked with the crew to enable the Scouts to pick their berthing area by rank as is our custom. The high school Scouts enjoyed the Chief's berthing area while the rest of us settled into a general berthing area. The bunks were three high and came with a pillow and US Navy

blanket. We quickly settled in and began a variety of activities including a tour of the ship and a briefing that kept the scouts riveted for at least a half hour. The food was provided by a caterer and we enjoyed baked ziti with meatballs, chicken fingers with barbeque sauce, fresh veggies, rolls & butter, juice, and cookies. The food was hot and plentiful and was delicious. The “Starboard” crew cleaned up the mess deck to the total satisfaction of the crew.

The USS Slater is a Destroyer Escort and performed convoy duty during WWII. It was a small ship as ships go but at 309 feet in length, provided plenty of nooks and crannies to explore. The best feature was the total maneuverability of the many guns. The gun mounts were restored and the Scouts could turn the cranks to rotate and level the guns to “shoot” the church steeple, rental truck, or passing boats. At sun set we performed colors (lowered the flag) on the fantail and raised them again at exactly 8:00 AM as is done on every ship in the Navy. The Troop 49 flag flew briskly in the morning sun from the yard arm too.

Taps was at 10:15 and with the exercise of the hike and my threat (promise) to make the next Scout who talks clean the bathroom, everyone was quiet and went right to sleep. I slept relatively well but the red lights were a bother. I was up and dressed on the gangway at 6:00 AM with the guide and he drove me down to the truck stop to get coffee. To keep the critter problem at bay, they did not allow any cooking or personal food on the ship, not even a coffee maker. I can understand their desire to keep the ship clean. The cold breakfast of cereal, bagels and muffins were enjoyed by all followed by the “Port” section doing the cleanup duty. After colors, the General Quarters (AKA Battle Stations) alarm sounded and the Scouts rushed to their battle stations on the guns, donned their helmets and took aim at the targets pointed out by the guide. It was a fun drill and the Scouts all loved it. After more free time to explore, and gift shop time, we packed up the cars and were on the road by 9:00 AM.

It was a great trip with the Scouts learning a lot, experiencing the history of the Revolutionary War and World War II and working together as a team. Oh, and a lot of fun was had by the Scouts and the parents too.

\*\*\* Written April 19, 2009 by Martin Treich, Scoutmaster \*\*\*