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About our cover: Once you've tried scuba diving, chances are you'll be hooked for life. It combines a touch of danger with a deep-down look at a glowing world of sea life. Flip Schulke got the cover shot for us and Vince Heptig took the photographs on pages 44 to 46.

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The Alumni Who Never Quit

BY KEITH MONROE

Photographs by Lawrence Migdale



Scouts and Cub Scouts are on center stage when Chinatown celebrates its own New Year.



Cub Scout Curtis Wong joins his father, Jones Wong, and grandfather Ron Lee.



Alumnus Lindsay Chu, is only the 12th man to lead Troop 3 in its 73-year history.

Former members of San Francisco's Troop 3 in Chinatown have banded together since 1934 to assure that their 73-year-old troop can be a positive force in the community.



Thomas Chin sits with former and current Scoutmasters Lindsay Chu and Ron Lee.



Post-parade fun is at long-time chartered organization, Cathay American Legion Post.

SO THE TROOP NEEDS a Scoutmaster? The alumni will produce one. Troop membership dwindling? Treasury low? Parents inactive? The alumni will ride to the rescue.

This may sound unreal but it's true—at least for San Francisco's Troop 3. Its 90-member alumni association, active since 1934, has grappled victoriously with all the above problems, not just once but often.

Troop 3 and its staunch ex-Scouts have long been proof that a Scout group can overcome a difficult environment. This troop took root in an impoverished, overcrowded, segregated district that was surrounded by suspicious neighbors. It has survived with glory, and in fact has helped change the district.

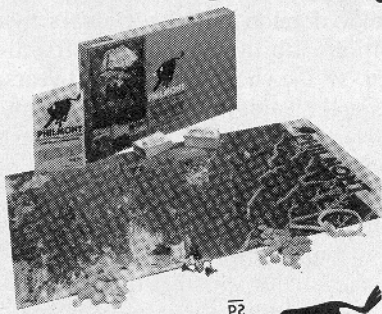
Troop 3 is in Chinatown, which is a town within a city, seven blocks by five, the largest Chinese settlement outside the Orient. *Crime and Human Nature*, a 1985 book by Harvard sociologists, pointed out: "During the 1960s one neighborhood in San Francisco had the

lowest income, the highest unemployment rate, the highest tuberculosis rate, and the highest proportion of substandard housing of any area of the city. That neighborhood was called Chinatown. Yet in 1965 there were only five persons of Chinese ancestry committed to prison in the entire state of California."

In 1914, in a Methodist churchyard in Chinatown, eight boys thumbed a tattered Boy Scout handbook and decided to become Scouts. They induced two Chinese adults to help start Troop 3 in a room of the tiny Chinese YMCA. During World War I their troop, galvanized by war-service drives, grew to four patrols "and raised morale in the face of opposition," a troop history says. "We believe our conduct would enhance our parents' credibility in our community."

There are grandfathers in Chinatown today who joined Troop 3 in the 1920s. "Without the troop I might have landed in prison," recalls Lim P. (continued on page 82)

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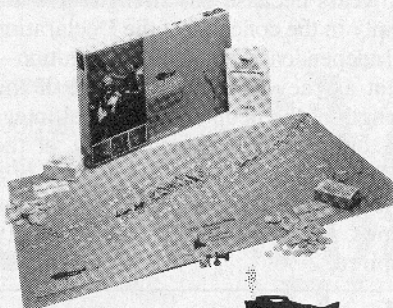


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Alumni (from page 37)

Lee, retired postmaster of San Francisco. "My parents worked into the night and couldn't keep track of me. I was among boys who got rich as runners for the tongs. The Hip Shing Tong ruled the gambling dens, the Wa Ting Shans were in charge of brothels, On Leon Society dealt in slave girls, somebody else controlled opium.

"These were gangs from the old country. They didn't speak English so they paid boys to carry word when a hatchetman or highbinder needed bail or a lawyer. But kids in Troop 3 stayed away from the tongs. Our Scoutmaster told us to. So did Sergeant John J. Manion of the police Chinatown Squad, who was chairman of our troop committee. Besides, our parents always said, 'Whatever you do, please don't disgrace us.'"

It was an era of cleanup in Chinatown. Backed by police and courts, families were resisting tongs that had preyed on them since the 1860s. But parents were cold to Troop 3 at first. The Chinese phrase for "Boy Scouts" also meant "boy soldiers," and soldiers were feared in China. Still, education was what parents wanted most for their children, and they marveled to hear Scouts talk of what they learned at troop meetings.

By necessity Troop 3 Scouts became good talkers. (Each day, flitting to and from schools outside Chinatown, they talked their way past other ethnic groups who harbored San Francisco's old-time bias against Asiatics.) This knack for rhetoric eventually pulled them into Good Turns that helped dispel the bias.

Fanciful commercial guides had, for decades, been cashing in on Chinatown's lurid repute. Nightly they led sightseers past various "tong headquarters" and into alleys assertedly teeming with vice. (No vice was visible. But tourists peered through cracks in barred doors, glimpsing dim-lit halls that seemed sinister although the buildings were really only tenements.)

All this saddened the Six Companies, the law-abiding unofficial government of Chinatown. After long parleys with civic officials, it was agreed that whenever a big organization held a convention in San Francisco (which happened often) a free guided tour of Chinatown would be offered—with Scouts as guides.

Troop 3's efficiency in shepherding busloads of conventioners became widely noted. At each of a half-dozen points a different Scout in uniform explained exotic sights and their meaning. The troop also kept first aid kits ready

and used them skillfully. It earned further thanks by alleviating a chronic problem for strollers in Chinatown: the lack of public restrooms. By prearrangement, Scouts directed people to facilities inside churches and certain halls.

Within a few years the sensational tour guides were out of business, and Chinatown was no longer thought sinful. Instead, San Franciscans and tourists flocked there to eat, shop, or merely enjoy the colorful atmosphere. Thousands thronged in for the annual Chinese festivals and parades, at which Troop 3 was a fixture. The whole troop turned out to direct traffic, answer questions, assist visitors who lost their way, and gather up litter.

To be smartly uniformed, as the troop was, required sacrifices. Outgrown uniforms were handed down year after year. Thomas W. Chinn, who joined in 1921 (and is now a distinguished editor, historian, and council Scouter) recalls what was done in his home: "My mother was a widow, and I was the eldest of six children. She couldn't buy me a Scout uniform. Somewhere I got an extremely old one, but I was ashamed to wear it because it was almost faded white. My mother soaked it in a washtub with a cupful of coffee grounds tied in a bag. It came out just about the right shade of khaki."

Tom Chinn and Lim Lee, like other Troop 3 people, speak reverently of Chingwah Lee, who became Scoutmaster in 1923 and served 25 years. "He was one of the original Scouts in 1914," Chinn says. "In fact, his Scout handbook got everything started. Even as a young Scoutmaster he was an art collector, with a studio full of fragile Chinese antiques. But the troop met in his studio after the YMCA got too crowded. What a risk!

"In 1933 he got the Cathay Post of the American Legion to take over our charter, and Troop 3 has met in the Legion hall ever since. Ching stayed on as Scoutmaster when he became a noted art lecturer, and when he was an interpreter at Sixth Army Headquarters during the war, and afterward when he was an appraiser for the Alien Property Custodian Bureau. We'll never forget how he taught older Scouts to look after younger ones on our camping trips."

To cherish the young is part of Chinese culture. This spirit led Chinn, Lee, and a score of other rising young adults to set up the Troop 3 Alumni Association, with printed stationery and formal articles of incorporation as a nonprofit institution. Its function, Chinn wrote, was "assuring the present-day Scouts of opportuni-

ties that we never had."

That meant fund-raising above all, which the association accomplished through an annual letter mailed only to past members of the troop. Each year the goal was \$1,000. Some years the appeal brought more, when as many as 50 alumni sent checks. The money was used for troop equipment, camperships to the neediest Scouts, court of honor awards, and insurance.

The alumni also set out "to continue the comradeship we developed over the years," as a printed bulletin phrased it,

From the day Troop 3 began, the alumni have backed it in every way.

"and to be a service organization to encourage the Scout movement in the community. Sometimes 150 people showed up for their anniversary parties, and more for annual picnics where the highlight was a Scouts-alumni ball game—sometimes with a new lineup of Scouts each inning, for Troop 3 had about 130 members (in three subtroops) during most of the 1930s.

"The fortunes of this organization have flooded and ebbed like the tide," Chinn wrote in a troop history. "Who among us can forget the halcyon days of the Thirties, when Troop 3 blazed to glory and community recognition, or the depressing times of the Forties when only the heart and spirit of the leadership kept the torch from total extinction?"

After Pearl Harbor all Chinatown's young men went off to war. Scouts began to skip meetings. Suddenly Troop 3 could barely muster one patrol. Alumni were busy with wartime duties, but they heard what was happening, and spread the word in Chinatown and beyond.

"Please send us some boys," urged a letter on Alumni Association stationery. "We have the leadership but we need boys to benefit from our trained leaders. We are asking your help to sell Troop 3 to any potential boy. Let's seek him out now, and let's be available to him."

This letter got results. "Some of us went out and recruited," Lim Lee recalls. "We visited families. Parents were afraid their sons would be sent into some terrible wilderness when Troop 3 went camping, and the kids weren't enthusiastic either, at that time. But we signed up quite a few, and kept them registered."

A worse crisis came later when Chingwah Lee finally asked to be re-

lieved as Scoutmaster. "An alumnus must take his place," everyone said. One by one, for a year or so at a time, alumni Bill Jow, Frank Leong, George Lew, and Mike Gam stepped in. They were businessmen with scant spare time, but they kept the troop alive.

In 1954 a really dedicated alumnus, Arnold Lim, took charge. "More camping," was his prescription, so alumni were car-drivers when other transport couldn't be arranged for camping trips. In Lim's first year the membership jumped from 7 to 22, and he kept it steady until 1961, often calling in alumni to help at troop meetings.

Later another quiet but determined alumnus, Ronald Lee (a college-trained engineer), began a 20-year tenure as Scoutmaster. He believed that some of the Alumni Association's work ought to be done by current parents. "I remember my own parents were very negative when I joined in 1945," he said. "Finally my dad changed his mind, and made me a bedroll. Why can't our alumni get more parents to change their minds?"

This wasn't easy, for many of the parents were immigrants from Laos, Vietnam, or Hong Kong. New letterheads appeared with the imprint *Troop 3 Alumni & Parents Association, Inc.* Lee persuaded the combined group to approve a rule that no Scout could receive an award at a court of honor unless one parent was present. There were a few unhappy Scouts at the next court, but the rule stuck, and parental attendance at courts has been high ever since.

Some fathers became assistant Scoutmasters. Eventually, under Lee, 10 of them took Wood Badge training—but found themselves with spare time in the troop, since patrol leaders and junior officers ran troop meetings. They went to work organizing training courses for the district, and helping other troops that sprang up in or near Chinatown. During the turbulent 1970s, when violent youth gangs occasionally made headlines in the district, the men from Troop 3 helped keep Scouting strong there.

A thousand or more boys have passed through Troop 3. The Alumni & Parents Association now receives a monthly report from the new Scoutmaster, 26-year-old Lindsay Chu (an alumnus, naturally), and governs itself through its 10-member board of trustees. As far into the future as anyone can see, the association seems likely to keep on holding big reunions where, as a recent invitation said, "Brother Scouts who haven't met for 10, 20, 30, or 40 years will gather around our campfire once again." ■

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