

Court of Honor Ceremonies
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He drew back his arrow and readied it for flight; the oil-soaked rag at the arrow's tip burned brightly against the night's dark shadows. As the bow's string slipped from his fingers, the flaming arrow departed into the darkness in frantic search of its aim.

The audience was silenced by this spectacle; only a loud whooshing sound was heard as the arrow flew overhead striking its intended target. Reaching the log pile ignition was swift and explosive. Within an instant, an eight-foot ball of fire plumed above the logs, followed immediately by a thunderous explosion! The startled audience gasped and leapt to their feet as several eight-foot logs were thrown like twigs from the burning wood pile. Several boys quickly rolled the flaming logs back into the fire, the audience calmed and the ceremony resumed!

This was a scene replayed from my life at age thirteen while a member of the Boy Scouts of America Troop 304, sponsored by Moose Lodge located in Jackson, Michigan.

Every two or three months we would hold a Court of Honor ceremony with the entire troop, its leadership, and their family members following our scheduled troop meeting. This ceremony involved the Scoutmaster making award presentations to recognize all scouts that had moved up a rank, or had earned merit badges since the last Court of Honor.

The council meeting took place on a large vacant lot located behind the Moose Lodge facility. This lot sloped gently downward for a distance of 80 feet before leveling off. This natural bank was used to seat all attendees of the Court of Honor ceremony.

Traditionally a large log cabin style bonfire was used for these ceremonies. The scouts began building this fire with a large pile of tinder surrounded by stacked kindling. The bonfire log construction first began with two 8 foot-long logs, 6 inches in diameter, laid parallel to each other and on opposite sides of the large tinder pile. A second pair of logs similar size was then laid at right angles on top of the first, and also on opposite sides of the tinder to form a square. This paired log cabin-like building sequence continued until there were four layers of logs standing approximately 4 feet tall. Though this type of bonfire was difficult to ignite it was desirable for this event, as it would burn brightly for a long period of time.

For a dramatic effect the fire-lighting invocation was skillfully performed by a scout using a bow to shoot a flaming arrow directly from the top of the hill downward into the pile of logs to ignite the fire. The Scoutmaster had previously instructed the boys to attach one end of a steel guy wire to the inside of the top camp fire log and then attach the other end to the top of a six-foot

tall pole located at the top of the hill. This guy wire was used to safely guide the flaming arrow's flight above the audience and directly into the bonfire.

The normal procedure employed to light this type of fire was for the scoutmaster to soak the logs with gasoline a few minutes prior to the event, but instead he had delegated this fire preparation responsibility to one of his scouts. Unbeknown to the Scoutmaster this scout proceeded to soak the fire logs with gasoline one hour prior to the event allowing the heavier than air explosive gasoline vapors to build and accumulate within the log pile.

The assigned scout stood tall, as he stood on a chair next to the six-foot pole. With an arrow affixed to the guy wire, he carefully loaded the nock of this arrow onto his bow string.

He drew back the arrow and readied it for flight, the Scoutmaster then lit the oil soaked rag attached to the tip of the arrow's shaft and the scout promptly released the bow string. The flaming arrow quickly left the bow and followed the invisible guy wire through the darkness.

The audience was silenced by this spectacle, only a loud whooshing sound was heard as this blazing arrow flew over their heads through the air hitting its intended target.

Well you know what happened next!

Let's just say that from that day forward, the Scoutmaster was the only person permitted to prepare the fire before Court of Honor Ceremonies.

The End