Boy Scouts take on great outdoors at annual summer camp

Story and photo by Ben Avey, CFAY Public Affairs

Boy Scouts from Yokosuka's Troop 35 and Ikego's Troop 13 spent a week camping with 132 of their peers at the annual Boy Scout Summer Camp at the Tama Hills Recreation Area June 14-20.

The camp, organized by the Boy Scouts' Far East Council Japan District, brings Boy Scouts from all over the Far East together to meet one another and learn about the outdoors in true scouting tradition.

Gushing with enthusiasm as he explained his favorite parts of the week, 11-year-old Boy Scout Jonathan Varner of Troop 35 was one example of many scouts at the camp.

"I've been camping with the Boy Scouts and having loads of fun," said Varner. "It was awesome shooting arrows [at the archery range], I even got to make my own arrow and bow string."

In addition to archery, Boy Scouts were able to participate and earn merit badges in a multitude of activities including hiking, rifle shooting, wilderness survival, orienteering, bugling, environmental science, horsemanship and many more.

Troops 35 and 13 Scouts went above and beyond and earned two to four merit badges per Scout for their efforts. Troop 13 went on to be recognized as the Summer Camp Honor Troop for their outstanding performance throughout the week.

(Center) IC2 (SW) Jason Kraker and Boy Scouts from Yokosuka's Troop 35 use bamboo and rope to build a catapult for a group project during the annual Boy Scout Summer Camp at the Tama Hills Recreation Area June 19. Troop 35 and Troop 13 of Ikego were among the more than 130 Scouts who attended the camp which brought together Scouts from around the Far East.

According to the official Boy Scout Web site, each merit badge activity presents a surmountable obstacle that when overcome, will help the Scout progress, at his own pace, through the ranks of the organization. Along with the reward of the merit badge, Scouts gain self-confidence and a sense of self-reliance with each achievement.

"They treated it like going to school in a way, but fun," said Troop 35 parent volunteer and Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Negishi Housing Detachment Officer in Charge Lt. Cmdr. Romadel de las Alas. "They would get to their courses, they would get to them on time or early, and they would learn about many skills that not only taught them about nature, but how to run your life."

But the real lessons of the camp were the teamwork and unity that brought the Scouts together to achieve success. Like the weather, which welcomed them with pouring rain before the sun came out mid-week, the Scouts improved as the week progressed.

"We went through a lot of growing with the troops," said de las Alas. "The boys grew up. It's only a week, but they come out and learn things about themselves. They learn things about nature. They learn things about organization, how to respect each other and how to work as a cohesive team…I would say it's a life changing opportunity."

Visit the Far East Council Web site at http://www.fareastcouncil.org or contact the Japan District Office at 263-7497 for more information about Boy Scouts.

CFAY pitches in, helps prepare Monkey Island for summer season

Story and photo by Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) personnel and family members took a trip across the bay to lend a hand to Yokosuka City by cleaning up Monkey Island, a historical island and popular spot for barbeque, swimming and summer fun, June 19.

CFAY Port Operations sponsored the community relations (COMREL) project and coordinated with Tryangle Co. to provide free transportation to and from the base via ferry. Electronics Technician 1st Class Ashton Mullen of Port Operations took the lead on the event and was pleased to have the chance to be able to do something fun that also helps out the community.

"It's important for the CFAY community and the tenant commands as a whole to show support for landmarks such as this and the surrounding area to show [Japanese citizens] that we appreciate being here and being guests, as well as appreciating the landmarks themselves," said Mullen. "We want to show that appreciation by pitching in and helping out in an effort to maintain cleanliness and safety."

More than 60 individuals showed up to aid in the effort to get the island ready for the busy summer season. The island presented a bit of a challenge to clean up due to its size and diverse terrain. The top of the island is a plateau with dense evergreen woodlands that cover the steep slopes falling toward the ocean. There are also three types of shores to be found on the island: a large sandy beach, rocky enclaves and large boulders butting up against steep inclines. Monkey Island is not only home to a rich natural environment containing a myriad of insects, animals and aquatic life; but also, contains historical sites ranging from ancient ruins to World War II era military structures.

(Left) BM2 John George and his daughter, Tia, work alongside CS3 Charles Bemley picking up trash and debris on Monkey Island during a community relations event sponsored by their department, Port Operations, June 19.

Many of the COMREL participants had never been to the island before and jumped at the chance to take advantage of the event on a beautiful June day. Religious Program Specialist 3rd Class William Leffler joined several of his shipmates from CFAY Chapel of Hope to take part in the COMREL.

"It was a chance to help out the community and check out the island," said Leffler. "It was great, it was fun and we got a lot accomplished. It was a good experience, getting to help out and show the Japanese that the Navy cares about Japan."

Volunteering to take part in COMREL events does more than just show appreciation to the local community; it is a great opportunity for Sailors and family members to learn new things and take on different perspectives and make new friends.

Normally, it's a really fun day outing where you get to interact with and meet a lot of people," said Mullen. "You give up some of your own time and that's OK, because you're going to have a blast."