

# Illustrated History of BSA Square Knot Evolution

George Crowl

## Part 2 – 1980-2015, Tan Knots

In September 1980 the uniform changed from khaki to a tan shirt. The backgrounds for the knots started to change from khaki to tan about 1983.<sup>33</sup> The fabric changed from fine twill to plain weave cloth. The borders initially remained brown, but have also migrated from brown to tan to almost silver-tan, so there are many varieties.



Professional Training Award



Heroism Award



Explorer Achievement



Varsity Scout



George Meany



Scoutmaster Award of Merit



Distinguished Commissioner

Until May 1980, there was a specific order of precedence for knots and awards, similar to that used by the military services to control the wearing of ribbons. When the Arrow of Light knot was introduced, it was to be worn ahead of the Eagle knot. The idea probably was that it was earned first. However, that raised a big reaction from the rank and file, who thought it definitely ought to come after the Eagle and other older boy ranks. The Uniforms and Insignia Committee neatly finessed this problem by deciding that they would no longer publish an order of precedence. The individual Scouter now decides the order he/she wishes to wear his/her knots in.<sup>34</sup>

In 1980 the **Professional Training Award** knot was introduced.<sup>35</sup>

In 1983, the **Heroism Award** knot was approved. It uses the solid red ropes of the Honor Medal against a white background, thus making the background color significant in discriminating between these awards.<sup>36</sup>

In 1983, Scouts wore a Cub device if they had earned the religious award in Cubs and a Scout device if earned in Scouting (but no device if only earned in Scouting). Explorers did not yet have the device authorized for the knot, but in at least one case it was used on the ribbon of the award! Complex, but this how these things evolve, rationalization takes some time.<sup>37</sup>

By 1986, the Silver Award II knot was redesignated for the **Explorer Achievement Award** and the Silver Award was now part of the “catch-all” function of this knot.<sup>38</sup>

By 1986, the **Varsity Scout** device, a VS in a circle, was introduced. The Varsity Key and Training Award were announced in May 1985.<sup>39</sup>

In the fall of 1987, three new knots were introduced. The **George Meany Award** had been in existence, and had a temporary patch since 1982. The knot was added in 1987. It was discontinued in 2011.

The **Scoutmaster's Award of Merit** was initiated that same fall. The Scoutmaster's Award of Merit with a white knot on tan, was again a knot where the background color determines the meaning.<sup>40</sup> Twelve years later, this knot also came to represent the **Venturing Advisor Award of Merit**.<sup>41</sup> It also served as **Varsity Coach Award of Merit** as well. These programs were terminated in January 2010 in favor of a new award and knot called the Unit Leader Award of Merit. This knot is no longer in Supply.

Also in 1987, the **Distinguished Commissioner Award** and square knot became available.

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1988 the **Scouter's Key as Cubmaster**, the **Scouter's Training Award in Cub Scouting**, the **Den Leader's Training Award** and the **Den Leader Coach's Training Award** were phased out. If earned, you may continue to wear the Key or STA with the Cub device.<sup>42</sup>

In their place were instituted the **Cubmaster Award, Den Leader Award, Webelos Den Leader Award, Den Leader Coach Award, and Cub Scouter Award**. New neck ribbon awards were instituted, which lasted until 2001 when they were phased out for lack of interest. The DLTA knot was retained for the DLA. The DLCTA knot was used for the CSA, causing some confusion and hurt feeling on the part of experienced DLCs. New square knots on blue or yellow background were instituted for the other awards.<sup>42</sup> It was announced in December 2011 the Cubmaster Award is being phased out with a return to the Scouter's Key. The Cub Scouter will return to the Scouter's Training Award. The Tiger Cub Den Leader and Webelos Den Leader will now receive the Den Leader Award (returning us to *status quo ante* 1988).<sup>61</sup>



Cubmaster Award, Den Leader Award, Webelos Leader Awd



Den Leader Coach Awd, Cub Scouter Awd, Tiger Cub Awd

Also by 1989, several new awards had knots associated with them. These included the **Spurgeon Award, the Whitney Young Award, and Seabadge**. One of the few non-square knot badges, the Seabadge “knot” is a trident.<sup>43</sup> In 2007, Shay Lelegren was informed that there were very few Spurgeon knots left in stock at National, and no plans to make any more. Apparently, though the award is still current for Exploring, they do not have appropriate uniforms to wear the knot on.<sup>60</sup>



**Spurgeon Award, Whitney Young Award, Seabadge**

Webelos



Hornaday Badge



Hornaday Award

By 1989, a **Webelos** device was introduced for the sole purpose of wearing on the youth religious award when earned by a Webelos Cub Scout. Also, by now, the use of devices on the youth religious knot had been rationalized, with four possible devices (Cub, Webelos, Scout and Explorer).<sup>44</sup>

Until 1991, the **Hornaday Award** did not have a square knot. You wore the Hornaday Badge in place of a square knot. The badge, illustrated left, has a beaver, a duck and a fish set against a forest background. The badge is awarded by the local council. The Hornaday knot, created in 1991, is only for the Bronze, Silver and Gold medal levels of the Hornaday Award, awarded by the National Council. So even today, some wear a Hornaday Badge because they did not earn a high enough Award to warrant the knot.<sup>45</sup>

In October 1992 the **Tiger Cub Group Coach Award** and knot was instituted.<sup>46</sup> This morphed to **Tiger Cub Coach Award** and has since become the **Tiger Cub Den Leader Award**, in 2001. The knot has remained the same, and is illustrated above with the other Cub Scout knots.



James E. West



District Committee



G.O.L.D. ("catch-all")

All these knots and devices have had catalog numbers since they were created. Sometimes, but seldom, the catalog number would change. The Scouter's Training Award and the Silver Award II were examples of this. By 1993, with the introduction of electronic scanning devices for pricing, it became necessary to re-number all the square knots and devices.<sup>47</sup> Almost all of the catalog numbers changed. They were for a while individually packaged with the UPC code printed on the package. Now they usually come by dozens with the UPC code.

The **James E. West Award** knot was issued in August 1993 when the award was introduced.<sup>48</sup>

By 1993, the **district committee** device, a tenderfoot badge in a plain circle, was introduced for the Scouter's Key as district committee. This device is not worn with the STA, since there is no way to earn the STA on the district committee.<sup>49</sup>

In 1995 the **Young American Award** is mentioned as one of the awards for the "catch-all" Silver Award knot. This knot has been officially identified to represent at least seven different awards, and seems to be used for several more by many Scouters. Those officially authorized at one time or another include Ranger, Ace, Silver Award I, Silver Award II, Explorer Achievement Award, Young American Award and **G.O.L.D. (Growth Opportunity in Leadership Development)**.<sup>50</sup> (G.O.L.D. was announced in September 1995.) Unofficially, Scouters have used it for the Exploring Leadership Award. In 1996 Ranger, Ace and Young American were dropped from the list of awards it represents. (However, once listed, I would use it since uniforms do not go obsolete.) For a time after 1999, the "catch-all" knot was no longer listed in the *Insignia Guide*. It is currently listed, with the direction that "All awards must have been earned prior to August, 1998." This direction is relatively recent. The date is the start of the current Venturing program. Again in 2012, the "catch-all" knot is deleted.



Scout Devices



Commissioner Devices



Venturing Device



1910/Founder's

Devices have undergone a gradual decline in detail and "quality." For instance, I have three Scout devices, bought in 1975, then perhaps five years later, and again about 1990. In the first, the device is fully modeled and completely cut out, with no fill between the upper and lower branches of the FDL. The second starts to fill that in, and the third makes the device look like a pentagon. My original national sample long post commissioner device has much more detail than the more recent ones, which are also flat. One interesting change, which took a while, is that the commissioner device was changed from a first class badge to a tenderfoot badge (surrounded by a wreath). The change was made on the embroidered badge in 1973, but not on the device until about 1995.

In 1999 the **Venturing** device was introduced to support the Venturing program. The Exploring device was no longer part of the Scouting program, having been moved to Learning for Life. The device is used on youth religious knots, Scouter's Keys, Scouter's Training Awards, and the Venturing Advisor's Award of Merit.<sup>51</sup>

Before September 2000, new devices were introduced for the James E. West knot, identifying the type of higher giving. Those types are: Direct gifts (**1910 Society**, \$25,000; up to Waite Phillips, \$1,000,000) and deferred gifts (**Founder's Circle** \$100,000 or more of deferred giving). The devices are the old (20s-60s) national executive insignia and the new Character Counts logo (based on the 40s Explorer Scout logo).<sup>48</sup> By 2003, at least the 1910 Society was deleted from Scout Shop stocks. As of March 31, 2006, only 1634 people had joined the 1910 Society, and 907 the Founders Circle.



Silver Award III/  
Summit Award

By 1999, the “catch-all” knot was no longer mentioned in the *Insignia Guide*, but was still available in 2011. It is no longer stocked as of 2012. It was replaced by the **Venturing Silver Award III** knot, instituted in 1999.<sup>52</sup> Though not a knot, there is also a metal bar for the **Ranger Award**, worn centered on the flap of the pocket rather than above the seam. Venturers also wear ribbons for their Bronze Awards and Gold Award, patterned after military ribbons. Oh, how the wheel turns! In 2014 the Venturing Silver Award (and Bronze and Gold) was phased out December 31<sup>st</sup>. In their place are new Venturing, Discovery, Pathfinder, and Summit Awards. The knot for the Summit Award remains the silver on green/white knot.

By 2002, the Den Leader Coach position was replaced with the Pack Trainer, and the **Den Leader Coach Award** (and knot) disappeared. The Pack Trainer knot was announced in 2006 (see below).



Community  
Organization Award

The **Community Organization Award** square knot, approved in 2002, recognizes Scouters’ awards from organizations such as Elks and Masons.<sup>53</sup> As of [January, 2016](#), there are **19** awards that fall into this classification. The Herbert J. Horton Alpha Phi Omega (ΑΦΩ) Youth Service Award; the American Legion Scouting Achievement Award; AMVETS BSA Youth Outreach Award; The Marvin M. Lewis Award of the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks (BPOE); the Department of Defense – United States Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal; the Daniel Carter Beard Masonic Scouter Award; Lions Clubs International Scouting Service Award; National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution Robert E. Burt Boy Scout Volunteer Award; the Cliff Dochterman Award of the International Rotarians Fellowship of Scouting; Ruritan Scout Leader National Service Award; the U.S. Power Squadron Finley Sea Scout Service Award; Veterans of Foreign Wars Scouter’s Achievement Award; George Meany Award of the American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO); Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Good Turn Service Award; Military Order of the World Wars; the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance H. Roe Bartle Training Award, the Philmont Staff Association Silver Sage Award, the Woods Services Award for Scouting with Special Needs, [and the American Radio Relay League](#). The George Meany Award used to have its own square knot design from 1987-2011, but was incorporated into the Community Organization Award. The COA is a gold/gold knot and border with a purple background.



International  
Scouter’s Award

The **International Scouter’s Award**, also approved in 2002, recognizes leadership, education and support of international Scouting events and programs. The purple/white knot is emblematic of the World Badge insignia.<sup>55</sup>



¡Scouting...Vale la  
Pena Service Award

In late 2003 two new knots were announced. The **¡Scouting...Vale la Pena! Service Award** is for Hispanic Scouting service. The **Asian American Spirit of Scouting Award** is for service to Asian American youth. The criteria are essentially identical, and based on the Whitney Young Award, outstanding service by an adult (or organization) for development and implementation of Scouting opportunities for Hispanic or Asian youth. Nominations are accepted from councils and approved by the Scoutreach Division of the national office.<sup>56</sup>



Asian American Spirit of  
Scouting



Venturing Leadership Award



William D. Boyce New Unit Organizer Award



Pack Trainer



Speakers' Knot



Doctor of Commissioner Science



NESA Life Member Commissioner Award of Excellence in Unit Service

In May 2003, a knot was approved for the **Venturing Leadership Award**. The approval was announced at the Philmont Venturing conference in June. The knot was released in September 2004. It follows the design of the old Explorer Silver Award II knot. The red background represents the national award, the green background the regional award, and the blue background the council award. The knot is shown with the blue to the observer's right, which is the correct way to wear it. The knot pattern is not obvious.<sup>57</sup> By 2010 the national and regional awards had stopped being awarded. Only the council award is current as of 2011. [By 2014 the knot was reinstated for youth only.](#)

In May 2005 a knot was announced for the **William D. Boyce New Unit Organizer Award**. This award recognizes volunteers who successfully organize a new traditional Scouting unit after March 1, 2005. It may be worn with up to three program devices to indicate additional units organized, and multiple devices of one kind are authorized. The color scheme of yellow, red and green represents our three traditional programs. The top is a scan of the first knot we received, the second is the published illustration.<sup>58</sup>

In September 2006 a new knot was announced for **Pack Trainers**, but it could not be earned before September 1, 2008. The scan is of the final official version, released in September of 2008. See Part 3 for an earlier error knot.<sup>59</sup> It appears as if there was a significant problem with figuring out what they really wanted to do! It was also announced for phase out in December, 2011, to be replaced by the Scouter's Training Award in 2013.<sup>61</sup>

In February 2008 Jim Costello of Great Sauk Trail Council made me aware of a web site, [www.speakers.scouting.org](http://www.speakers.scouting.org), which provides resources to officially designated speakers for the BSA to speak on a variety of topics. On that site, it states that a speaker who makes 20 speeches and files a report on each will be recognized at the National Meeting with a square knot. A scan of the **Speakers' Knot** is at the left. The knot was initiated in 2007 and discontinued on March 31, 2012.

In May 2008 I was advised that three additional knots were approved. The **Doctor of Commissioner Science** knot is awarded, in short, for completing the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's of Commissioner Science degrees, five years tenure as a commissioner, and completion of a thesis or project. The design is the Distinguished Commissioner knot with a gold instead of silver border.

The National Eagle Scout Association now has a knot, announced in "*The Eagleletter*" Spring 2008 issue, for **life members of NESA**. It is the Eagle knot design with a silver border. It is to be worn in place of, not in addition to, the normal Eagle knot. The very first edition of this knot was oversize, badly so, and was recalled. See Part 3.



PTC Master Track

**Philmont Training Center Master Track** knot is earned by attending at least two PTC courses, recruiting three people to attend PTC, and teaching in training courses at the district, council, or regional level on return from PTC. The design of red and yellow is representative of the colors of the New Mexico state flag. There is also a



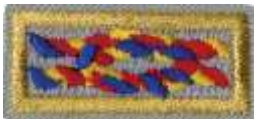
PTC device for finishing the third level of the track. Jeremy Cleary pointed me to the USSSP page where the device is shown. The last three images are courtesy of Scott Sandrock.



Unit Leader Award of Merit

Each of these last four knots initially came out in an oversize version, which was quickly recalled by the Supply Division. See Part 3 for further treatment.

Announced at the beginning of January 2010 is the **Unit Leader Award of Merit**. The knot is gold Mylar knot and border, with Navy blue background. This award replaces the Scoutmaster/Coach/Advisor Award of Merit, with new requirements, and was effective immediately. Cubmasters are now also eligible. It may be earned if the previous award was earned. See [http://scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-003\\_WB.pdf](http://scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-003_WB.pdf) for the application. Thanks to Al Bormuth for the timely notification and Skip Herring for some questions answered.



BSA Alumni Award

Announced in December 2010, but with the requirements not posted until January 2011, the **BSA Alumni Award** recognizes registered Scouter alumni who are involved in alumni identification and promotion, alumni engagement, personal participation, and personal education.



Commissioner Award of Excellence in Unit Service

Announced in May 2011 is the Commissioner Award of Excellence in Unit Service. It is designed to recognize those commissioners who provide regular unit visitation and through their assistance increase retention in their served units and help them improve their unit program.



OA device

The Order of the Arrow device is awarded to those members who have earned the James E. West Award, and have given an additional \$1000 to the National Order of the Arrow Endowment Fund. This device was announced in 2011.



Tiger Cub device

Produced in 2012 is a new Tiger Cub device to go on the new Den Leader Training Award medal and on the Den Leader knot. To summarize the current state of Cub Scout knots and awards: Cubmasters earn the Scouter's Key with a Cub device; Tiger Den Leaders, Cub Den Leaders, and Webelos Den Leaders earn the Den Leader Training Award with Tiger, Cub, and/or Webelos devices; all other Cub Scout leaders earn the Scouter's Training Award with a Cub device.



Bronze, Gold, Silver NESAs Service Project Devices

The NESAs Service Project of the Year device is awarded to the youth whose Eagle Service project for that year is selected as the winner at the council, region, and national level. The council device is bronze, the regional device is gold, the national device is silver.



NOESA device

The NESAs Outstanding Eagle Scout Award (NOESA) is granted by a council with the approval of the national office to adults who have demonstrated outstanding achievement at the local, state or regional level.

In recent years there have been a plethora of knots that have been pushed by various special interests in the BSA to promote their programs. It appears that there is now a reaction to the many knots. Some of the knots are being allowed to expire, or no longer being made. The Explorer Achievement Award knot and the Spurgeon Award knot will no longer be manufactured (the awards lapsed in 1999). The Meany Award has been merged into the Community Organization Award, the knot will no longer be made and COA knot will be worn instead. The Speaker's Bank knot is being discontinued with no new speakers being accepted for the knot by the end of 2011.

I have been advised that other knots have been considered for deletion, and will provide that information as I get it authoritatively.

If you are interested in specific varieties of all or a single series of knots over time, a monograph titled *Varieties of Official BSA Square Knots* is available. It covers all official knots from their first issue to the current issues with scans of each major variety. It is also available from the author.

I am indebted for help with sources to Nancy Cramer of Las Vegas, who took peer review to new heights. She provided me many additional references after she looked at an earlier version of this monograph. I also received help from Shay Lelegren and Gary Whitman, fellow knot aficionados. Bruce Noonan was the first to tell me of the Vale la Pena and Asian-American awards. Ed Brown alerted me to the New Unit Organizer Award. I hope this exposition has been of interest. As you can see, there are still some gaps to fill in. If you have information that would help, please contact me at [George@Crowl.org](mailto:George@Crowl.org) or 832-467-1998 or 16213 Congo Ln, Jersey Village, TX 77040-2011.

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