THE BRONZE WOLF: A SHORT HISTORY

During the early years of the development of the Scout Movement throughout the world, it was the practice of the Founder, Lord Baden-Powell, to give the Silver Wolf – a national British award – to Scouters in any country who had done outstandingly valuable work for the Movement.

The award was of course highly valued, but it began to be realized that the Silver Wolf was a British Scout decoration, even though it was given by the Chief Scout of the World.

Accordingly, the International Committee decided in 1924 to ask Baden-Powell if he would consider the institution of a special award, which might be offered in their name “to be awarded on the recommendation of the International Committee for outstanding international services to the Scout Movement”.

The Chief Scout, as was his habit, gave the suggestion long and careful thought, weighing up the pros and cons. He was anxious to avoid a multiplicity of awards, but at the same time he realized that there was a definite need for something to fill this particular need.

In 1932 he reopened the question and after further consultations with the International Committee it was decided in June 1934 to create the award of the Bronze Wolf.

As its name implies the decoration is a wolf in bronze and it is worn round the neck on a green ribbon with a yellow edging. Bronze was purposely chosen in preference to such ‘nobler’ metals as gold or silver to underline the spirit of simplicity of the Movement. It was thought that the highest award in the Movement should consist in something having almost no intrinsic value. The award was to be – and has remained since – the only one existing at world level.

On the proposal of one of its members, Mr. Walter H. Head, the International Committee unanimously awarded the first Bronze Wolf to Lord Baden-Powell himself.

At the Ninth International Conference (The Hague, August 1937), B.-P., who was wearing the Bronze Wolf, presented it to three others on behalf of the International Committee: to Walter de Bonstetten (Switzerland), for the founding and supervision of the International Scout Chalet at Kandersteg; to Hubert S. Martin (Great Britain), for his indefatigable work as Director of the International Bureau since 1920; and to John S. Wilson (Great Britain), for his work as Camp Chief at Gilwell Park since 1923 in promoting an international understanding of Scouting.

In the subsequent twenty years only fourteen other awards were made, six of them in the 50th Jubilee Year (1957). This was in accordance with the International Committee’s policy that the award should only be made for “outstanding international services” and with their earlier decision that no more than two awards would normally be made during any one biennial period. However, this decision was made when the strength of Scouting throughout the world was much less than it is today.

Today, the Bronze Wolf is still the only award made by the World Scout Committee – the successor to the International Committee. It is given solely in recognition of outstanding services by an individual to the World Scout Movement. Under present guidelines, approximately one award for each 2,000,000 members worldwide can be made each year. Today, exactly eighty five years after the institution of the award, a total of 371 awards have been made. A number of our brothers and sisters holders have gone home, but fortunately still a lot of us, including you all there, are still alive…. and I can only wish you a long long life … and tell you: see you at the 2020 World Scout Conference in Egypt when and where it is very likely that we will continue the tradition to have a Bronze Wolf holders luncheon.

Delivered by Luc Panissod on the occasion of the 5th Bronze Wolf holders gathering held on 23 July 2019 at the 2019 North America World Scout Jamboree at the Summit Bechtel Scout Reserve, West Virginia, USA