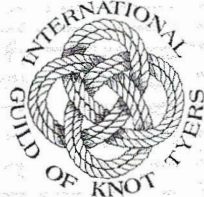


# KNOT



# NEWS

INTERNATIONAL GUILD OF KNOT TYERS - PACIFIC AMERICAS BRANCH

August 1999

Joseph Schmidbauer-Editor

Issue #18

## BLACKJACKS

BY STUART GRAINGER AND KARL BAREUTHER

"I have heard of a sailor who carried an unfinished blackjack in his ditty bag for several voyages until at last he found a shipmate who could teach him the knot he wished to finish off with."

*The Ashley Book of Knots*

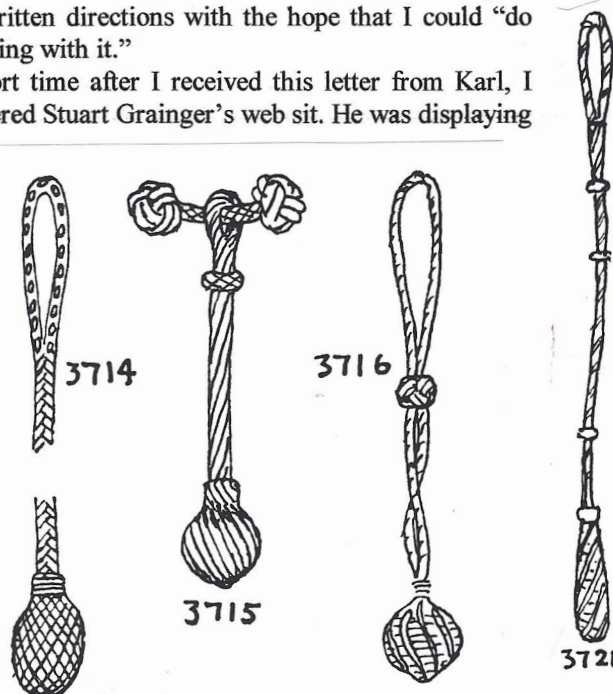
I first met Karl Bareuther at the Ashley Retrospective held at the New Bedford Whaling Museum during the summer of 1997. Walking up to his display, I was immediately struck by the well crafted quality of his knotted pieces. Here was someone trying to keep the old seaman's arts alive! His sea chest becket were exceptional and there was also a very nice boatswain call lanyard. I was especially struck, though, by his examples of the blackjack. This is something you don't see explained too often in the knotting literature. Ashley mentions then almost in passing but manages to still add his own touch of humor.

I corresponded with Karl on and off for the next year and I finally asked him how he worked out the design. "The first blackjack I have seen," he replied, "is in a display at the Maritime Museum in Savannah, Georgia. It was made with 2mm cotton cord. Another one was advertised in an antiques catalog of Norman Flagderman (author of the famous book *Scrimshaw* and Florida antique-dealer. Don't know if he is still alive.) Flagderman's blackjack was an old one and the handle was made of two or three strand rope (very rough). He dated it c1830. He asked \$400 for it. And Des Pawson

owns an old blackjack too. The one I found in Savannah is made like mine with some small differences."

He sent me drawings on how to make his blackjack with written directions with the hope that I could "do something with it."

A short time after I received this letter from Karl, I discovered Stuart Grainger's web sit. He was displaying



3714. A "life preserver" twenty-two inches long. Becket of FOUR-STRAND SQUARE SINNET, the lanyard EIGHT-STRAND SQUARE SINNET, DIAMOND KNOT in end. A leather bag containing shot is needle hitched and seized around the neck of a knot on the lanyard.

3715. A blackjack, ten and a half inches long, that started out to be a chest becket. Evidently the sailor's requirements changed as his ship neared port. The knobs are MANROPE KNOTS, the bolt, eye, and lanyard are needle hitched. The lead ball is rib hitched.

3716. A blackjack consisting of a rib hitched lead ball, a tarred codfish line lanyard, and a DOUBLE KNIFE LANYARD KNOT.

3721. A thirty-two-inch blackjack. The becket is an EYE SPLICE, the neck of which is hitched over. The loaded end is also hitched over. FOUR TURK'S-HEADS (THREE-LEAD X FOUR-BIGHT X THREE-PLY) are added and the rope is wormed.

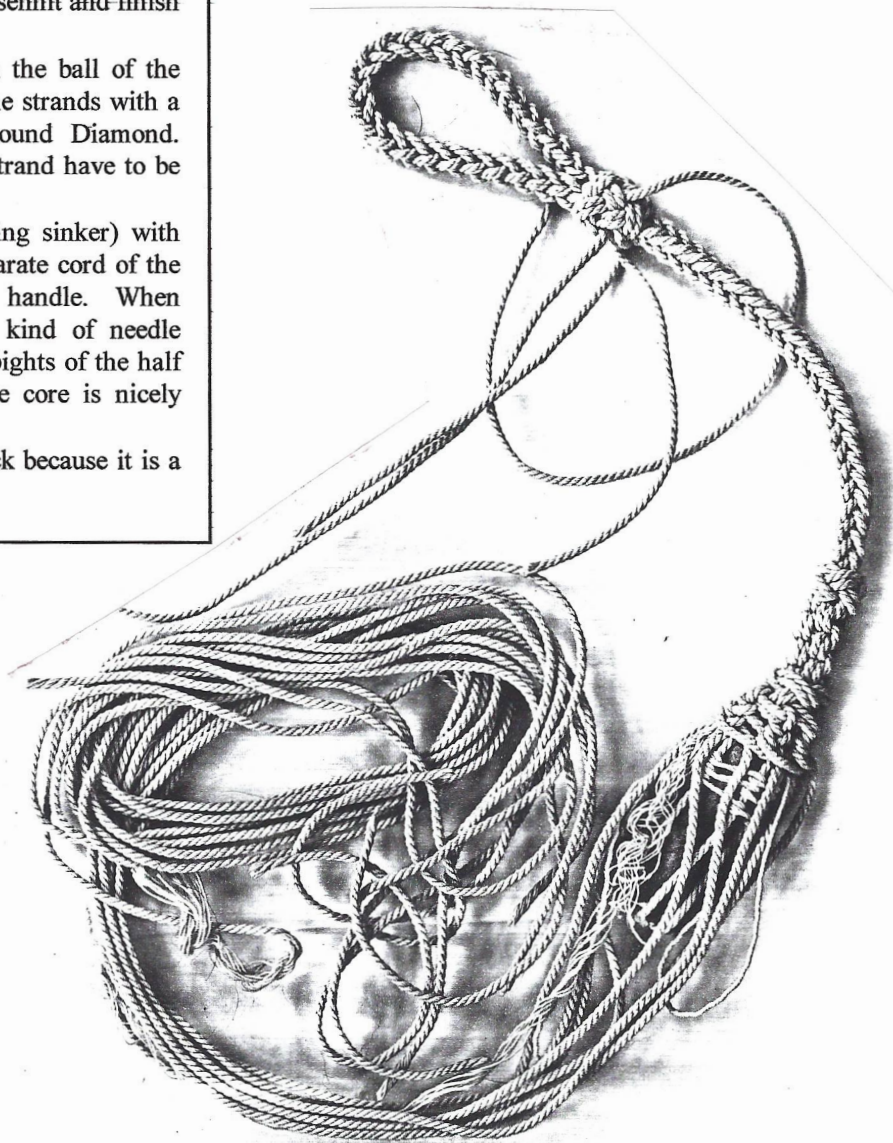


a sample of his new book and also selling his 'Grip Fid.' I started a correspondence with Mr. Grainger and then, on a whim, asked him if he'd like to try his hand at drawing a blackjack:

### **KARLS'S BLACKJACK**

1. Take four strings of equal length of about nine feet and 2 strings of about two feet. Middle the four and connect the two stings with a temporary seizing.
2. Make a half round sennit of convenient length (so that you can lead your hand through the eye to be formed).
3. On completion of the half round sennit, join the four strings so that you have now eight. Put on a temporary seizing. Leave the four short ones because you will have to tie a Double Footrope Knot later out of them.
4. With the eight strands make an eight strand sennit and finish it with a Double Diamond.
5. Continue with four (double) chain sennit and finish with a Half Round Diamond.
6. Now lead all the strands through the ball of the core and lay them back. Fasten the strands with a seizing close under the Half Round Diamond. When layed back and seized the strand have to be cut.
7. Cover the core (lead ball or fishing sinker) with small rope stuff. Start with a separate cord of the same size string you worked the handle. When covering the ball, put on some kind of needle hitching, starting from the lower bights of the half round diamond. By the end, the core is nicely woven in the needle hitching.
8. Now be careful with your Blackjack because it is a dangerous lethal weapon!

"I was interested to hear about your blackjack project as I have made several such items over the years. The original was commissioned by an elderly lady who lived in an isolated cottage on Dartmoor, in Devon, and who worried about possible intruders. The one I made for her, which she hung beside her living room fireplace, was basically a bell-rope but with a lead filled Pineapple Knot at the lower end and with the eye at the other end slightly extended to pass over the wrist. I doubt that she ever had used it or had a need to, but it made her feel safer and several of her friends asked for similar ones. I had to invoice them as Bell Lanyards because the police can be quite awkward in this country if they think you are making weapons; and Blackjacks, or Truncheons, would be regarded as weapons. The customers promised to tell the police that they were Bell Lanyards, if asked, not that any policeman would be genuinely worried, unless one of the "Old Dears" had actually killed someone, which was most unlikely!"



### STUART'S BLACKJACK

1. The blackjack shown in the photograph was made from instructions supplied by Karl Bareuther to Joe Schmidbauer of the Pacific Americas Branch of the IGKT, who passed them on to me with a half-completed example, so that I could make a drawing. Unfortunately neither of us were able to fully decipher the instructions, so I have to try a "free" interpretation of my own, which I believe to be quite near the original.
2. The eye is made by forming a six strand round sennit and tucking the ends to make a Diamond Knot. (The instructions say a half round sennit and Footrope Knot). The sample sent to me had the eye formed of six strand square sennit and, below the eye is eight strand square sennit. In my effort, below the Diamond is six strand round (really hexagonal in section sennit of alternating Crowns, culminating in six strand Wall and Crown, tripled).
3. Below this point the remaining four strands are doubled back on themselves and the ends tucked into the Wall and Crown, to make eight strands, uncut at the ends. These are then formed into eight strand double chain sennit. At the end of the sennit, the double ends are passed through the hole in a lead weight, passed back over the outside of the weight and then seized together at the lower end of the sennit. Finally the whole weight is covered with Half Hitching in cord about one third the diameter of the original cord and of the same material (braided white glaze cotton).
4. Note that the original sent to me was of 2mm three strand cotton material where I have used 3mm braided glaze cotton, for the sake of my shaky hands and dimming eyesight!
5. The instructions required the Half Hitching to be made using the unlaidd strands of the original material, but this was not possible with braided line. Fortunately I had some identical line available in smaller size, (about 1mm).
6. I found it impossible to reconcile the instructions with the sample, because the terminology of the translation made inadequate sense. For instance the word "join" is used to indicate different concepts. The method of measuring the original strands and seizing them together is not entirely clear from the instructions and the term "half round" is used to describe both sennit and Diamond Knots, but this is not apparent from the sample. I have not been able to find a Half Round Diamond Knot in any of my reference books, although there are at least three examples of half round sennit in The Ashley Book of Knots.

But there is always someone with a different opinion, as evidenced by this note I got from **Pieter van de Griend**: "Harvey Garret Smith believes a Star Knot makes a great blackjack. You should have a look at his book *The Marlinespike Sailor*, but I doubt you will find many other illustrations of blackjacks other than in Ashley or Graumont and Hensel. Sailors were quite pragmatic in that field. They'd swing anything from a string, much like the Japanese nun-chaku. To indulge in some fancy knotting to give someone a battering over the head seems a bit far-fetched to say the least. Moreover, why make a fancy blackjack if you're not going to sharpen your skills in using it?!"

### SECRETARY'S BLOTTER

The Secretary has gotten a few issues of *Knot News* returned by the mailman. The members who have moved obviously won't be reading this, but if any member is planning to move, please send in your new address so you won't miss a single newsletter.

Also, there is now a limited supply of all back issues of *Knot News*. These are for the asking by any Guild member, as long as supplies last. Once these are gone, they will only be re-issued, as requested, for a fee.

The Secretary has had a change of Zip Code, it is now **92880**. The old zip will still be good for a year but please update your records now to avoid confusion later.

### FROM THE MAIL BAG

**LuAnne Kozma** of Michigan sent this note: "I am writing a sort of article (for the non-knot tying world) about the tradition of knot boards and who makes them, why and how they are used.

What do you think of my classification scheme?

Some knot boards are used for teaching purposes, and have a variety of knots arranged methodically to teach concepts, categories of knots, or even steps in the process of tying a knot. These are working boards. Don't have to be pretty. Used in educational settings.

Others are like resumes: personal statements by an individual that show what the person can do and has accomplished.

Some are made as commemorative gifts for a person. Are made to look great, perhaps speak to the person's abilities."



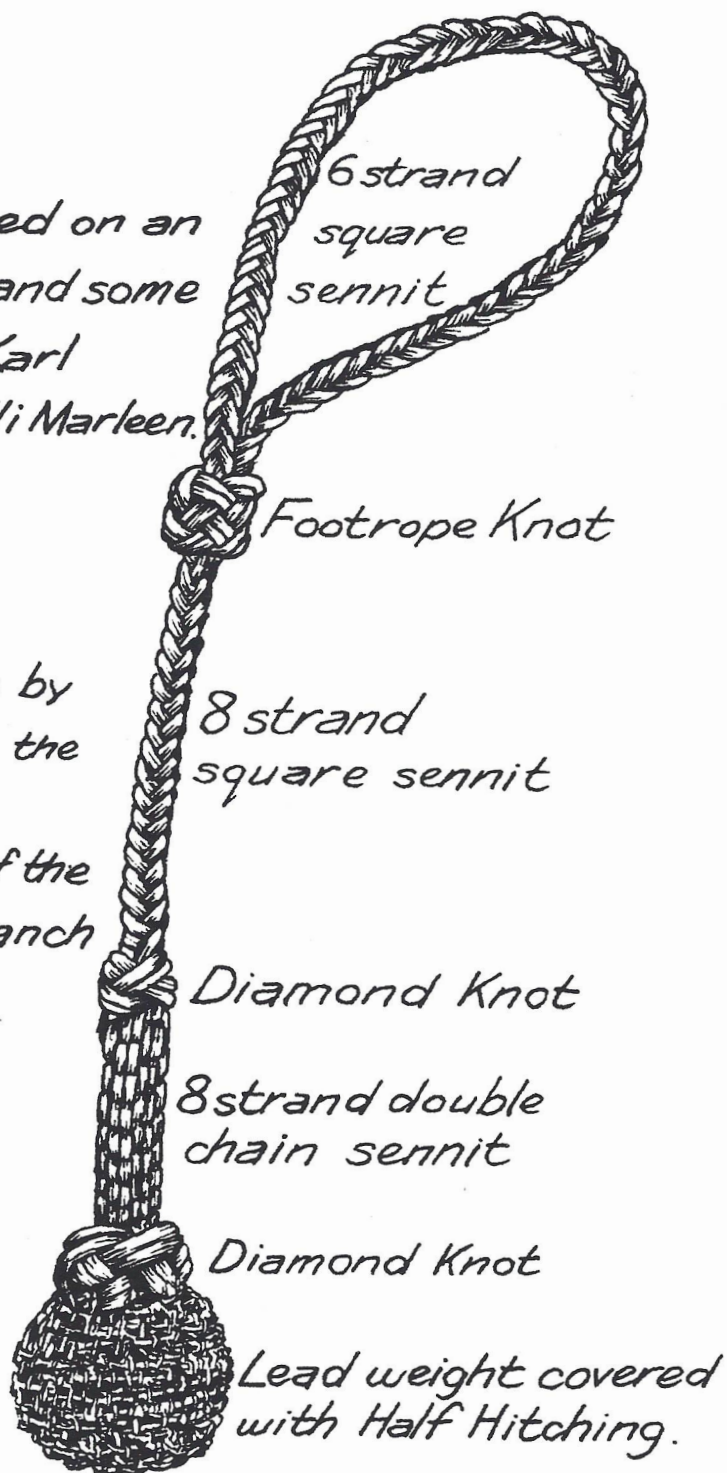
**Sam Lanham** from the Texas Hill country wrote: "Bell ropes I do are for church bells and I do them as a contribution. I braid and knot the shorter ones (5 foot to 9 foot, say) and for the longer ones I'm using a core of static nylon rope and covering it with pointing, grafting, crown sennit, hitching and some knots. My current project is a 50 foot rope of which 14 foot will be covered (the rest is not visible from the floor). I plan



## Blackjack.

A realisation based on an incomplete sample and some instructions from Karl Bareuther, S.Y. Lilli Marleen.

This drawing made by Stuart Grainger at the request of Joe Schmidbauer of the Pacific Americas Branch of the I.G.K.T.



(if I can pull it off, so to speak) to use textures, materials, and colors to symbolize a kind of time line of the church's history. The church is in Mendocino, California and is the oldest active Presbyterian congregation in California. So I'm interested in knowing more about coverings. I'm particularly impressed by the covered or knotted anchors by the Dutch tyers shown on Dan's museum site."



**Alex Kleider** of California sent this in: "As to what I'm doing re knotting: well not much really. In my work we use "bone wax" and there's a lot of string about (thrown out when no longer needed to wrap towels) so I've been developing ways of waxing the string. Sutures come in foil wraps so I've been putting unused bone wax and string into the empty foils and sticking it all in the oven at 200 F for 20 minutes or so and voi la! Waxed string! Now to find a use for it all! Using it to put a double constrictor onto my pens and pencils identifies them clearly as mine. Occasionally there is a need for a whipping.

A friend of mine in the tree business liked the core line I fashioned him and I've recently made him another using a "shackle splice" as shown in Toss' *Chapman Book of Knots* to attach a snap to a 3/4" laid rope.

In general, I seem to be forgetting how to tie at a faster rate than learning new things.

The jug sling remains one of my favorite and I'm now able to pretty consistently get it right the first time each time I try. Not the case when I first began using it to make water jugs out of polyethelyne liter bottles."



**Margaret White** of California had this to say: "I have enjoyed knotting for a long time. I did macramé in the good ol' sixties, but I took it one step further than plant holders. I actually did sculptures of sorts. I also did bottles.

I am currently working on a bottle using what they call tiger tail. It is a small flax covered with wax. It is supposed to be for stringing beads, but I like working with it. I'd say it is as thick as five or six strands of dental floss. I find knotting very relaxing."

## LOS ANGELES MARITIME MUSEUM

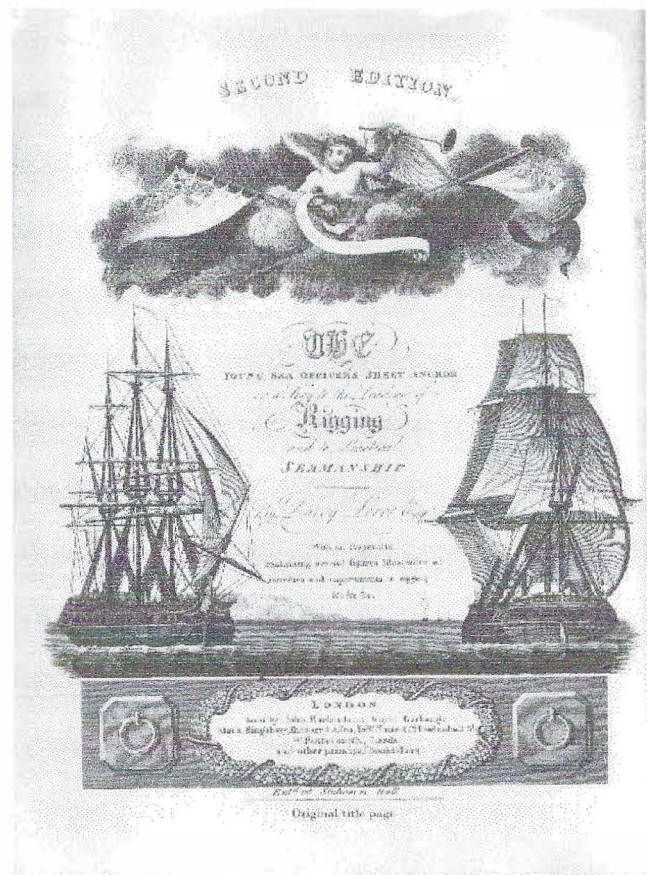
When the Long Beach Naval Shipyard in Southern California was closing, the Maritime Museum in nearby San Pedro had a chance to obtain a number of treasures. One of the pieces they picked up was a wonderful knotboard. It was in need of repair and the knot key had been lost during the move. The Museum turned to the Guild for help. After some delays, the Secretary of the Branch finally did roll up his sleeves and get to work. The board was opened up, a few knots were reattached and was everything was cleaned up and

straightened. For a final touch, the plexiglass cover was replaced. A new key was worked up and the list sent in to the museum curator. The knotboard now hangs on display in the Museum. A placard is next to it with this legend:

**A**long with scrimshaw, knot tying is best known as a sailor's art. Long before the age of containerships, knot tying skills were an essential part of shipboard life for any sailor responsible for securing cargo on board or adjusting the hundreds of lines of rigging. In their free time, sailors would perfect their knotting skills, experimenting with different knots and learning new techniques from fellow crew members.

The knotboard exhibited here was completed in August of 1966 at Long Beach Naval Shipyard, Long Beach California. The work was performed by the crew of Oiler YO-130, whose names are engraved on the plaque at the lower right corner of the knotboard. This knotboard includes excellent examples of a wide variety of knots, many of which are quite complicated.

Today, in Southern California, the art of knot tying is kept alive by the Pacific Americas Branch of the International Guild of Knot Tyers. This group, an affiliate of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum, repaired the knotboard after its arrival at the museum, and provided the key to the 78 knots depicted."





## BRANCH LIBRARY

Some more very generous donations to our Library:

*The Handicrafts of the Sailor* by Steven Banks

Arco Publishing Co; 1974

DONATED BY LINDSEY PHILPOTT

*Braiding and Knotting: Techniques and Projects* by  
Constantine A. Belish

Dover Publishing; 1974

*Square Knot Handicraft Guide* by Raoul Graumont and  
Elmer Wenstrom

Cornell Maritime Press; 1949

*The Ashley Book of Knots* by Clifford W. Ashley

Doubleday Press; 1944

*The Book of Ornamental Knots* by John Hensel

Charles Scribner's Sons; 1974

*The Handbook of Knots* by Raoul Graumont

Cornell Maritime Press; 1945

DONATED BY JOE SCHMIDBAUER

## MEMBER PROFILE

MADERO "MAT" O'CAMPO

The Navy sparked my interest in knot-tying in 1954, aboard the *USS Oriskany*, where I learned to braid and mastered the Turk's Head. Later, while in the *VP-50*, with a lot of help from *The Encyclopedia of Knots and Fancy Ropework*, I covered, seemingly endless railings and Ocean Mats. One of my better efforts, at the time, was a 4 ft by 8 ft knotboard with our squadron name, a 3 ft anchor centerpiece, with a sennit border. I continued to work rope until my discharge from the Navy in 1958.

College and career took precedence over hobbies for the next few years. I did become interested in magic and from 1960 to present am a member of *The Magic Castle*. After an unfortunate encounter with a monkey, which left several severed nerves in my right hand, I was forced to find another hobby, as there are not many magic tricks one can do with one hand. Therefore, I once again began to tie knots.

With time and patience, I have extended my basic knowledge and am now making jewelry, frames, mats, fenders, railings, knotboards and whatever else I can get a line around. When I'm not working with knots, I enjoy sculpting with polymere clay. I am extremely proud of my sculpted wizards and jewelry.

For 18 years I lived on a 30 ft *Owens* powerboat which I just recently sold. Although I now live in Long Beach, I still spend a great deal of time on my 21 ft *Islander* sailboat. Retirement has given me time for sailing, sculpting, fishing and tying knots.

PAB has given me the opportunity to meet other "knotty" people, which I have greatly enjoyed, and for that, I thank you.

## IN THE NEWS

**Winkie Fordney** of California sent this article to us, it appeared in the *Star Free Press* of Ventura County.

### **He Ties Up Prize for Tiniest Knots**

Using laser beams like tweezers, a Japanese researcher has managed to tie incredibly tiny knots in strands of DNA.

Now, the feat is little more than a gee-whiz trick. But researchers at Keio University in Yokohama envision someday using the technique to tie off parts of cells to learn about their workings.

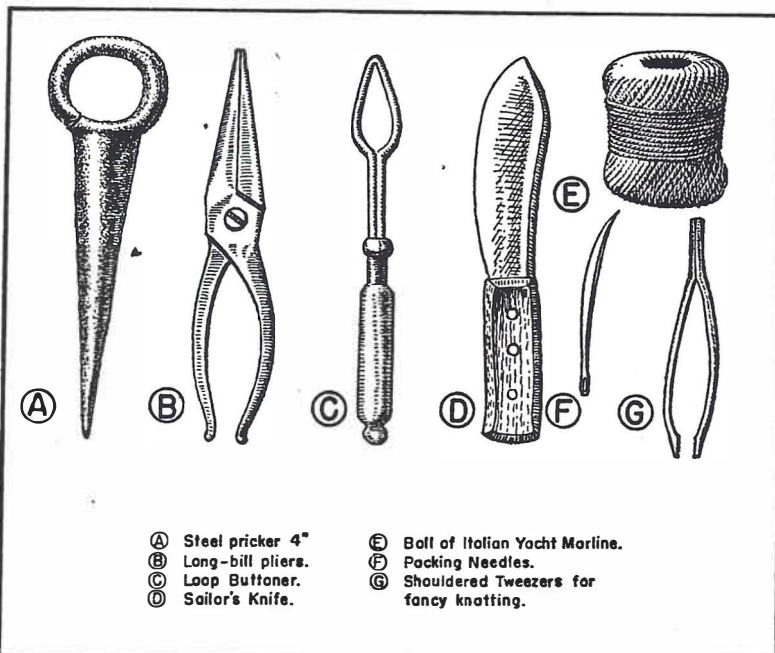
Gradute student Yasuharu Arai used a powerful microscope equipped with optical tweezers — a laser beam split into two independently controlled beams — to twist the molecular strings.

After months of failure, he has knotted more than a dozen strands of DNA from a fish-infecting virus. He has even put two knots in a few strands.

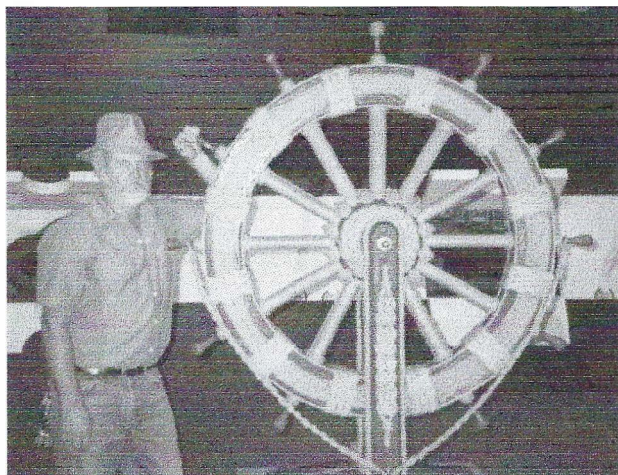
"We did it for fun and for the challenge, just like climbing Mount Everest for the first time," said Kazuhiko Kinoshita Jr., a physics professor who helped coordinate the project. The work is described in today's [June 99] issue of the journal *Nature*.

Arai performed the feat as part of his master's thesis in physics. He now works for an automotive company.

*The Associated Press*



**SAILORS' ROPE TOOLS**



### **BRANCH BITS**

**Bob Schwartz** of Washington took the time to write us this letter: "I finally got my issue of KN 16. The Post Office hadn't quite shredded it but it was torn quite a bit. I'm pretty good at 'paste-up' so when I got it together, I was able to enjoy an interesting issue. I mainly took an interest in the article by your nephew. First, because although during my 23 years in Rescue/Survival work in the Air Force, I was involved mostly in Water Survival Training. Among other duties, I had three assignments in POW training so the MIA association hit close to home.

The 550 cord was my main interest in writing this letter. Notice that I didn't hyphenate 550. This number represents the 550 lb. test strength attributed to this cord. Inside are seven inner cord/core lines, each at 35 lb. test strength. One of the seven is colored, solid or mixed. As each cord is composed of three strands (right hand twist), many variations of color are possible. I gave up my collecting of these many years ago but I still have nineteen variations available. The colors represent dates of manufacture. I believe the year only is represented as shelf life determines when the chute is usually taken out of circulation. Then, at least in the Air Force, many chutes were sent to survival schools to use in training students to use the materials for shelters, sleeping bags, etc., from the chute material. The webbing might be used for web belts, pack straps, knife sheaths (I've sewn over a dozen), etc., and the line for anything imaginable.

I've square-knotted many belts and a hammock out of it. This line is usually referred to as 550 cord, 'chute line or shroud line. This last term referring to the jump: instead of ending in a PLF (Parachute Landing Fall) it ended in a PFL (figure it out). And if serious enough, the chute was then a shroud. My first jump was bad, but not that bad!

Simple math would tell us that  $7 \times 35 = 245$ . Taken from 550 leaves the sheath strength at 305. Sometimes

I've dealt with cord that had twelve inner core lines, each at 35 lb. test strength. This then added 175 lbs. test strength to the over all test strength (725 lbs.) These were used for cargo chutes and some other heavy duty uses I'm not familiar with. The sheath size seems to be about the same size.

In all cases, inner core lines are white. The sheath colors vary. Not only white and olive drab, but also white with a light spiral dotted black line, a darker OD and a medium shade OD both with the aforementioned spiral line. Other colors are red, black, maroon, and orange (very limited). The white can also be dyed pretty good, with a vinegar and water fixer.

I've made a number of watch bands out of the inner core years ago. They wear pretty well but the belt loop usually wears out first. Last summer I also made a knife sheath out of white 550 cord for a folding knife. It was for my older son-in-law. As I only had scrap pieces available, it took a little ingenuity!

I've sewn a lot of material with the inner core and just two days ago I used one strand of the inner core for some fine sewing work. That size is also pretty good for dental floss and suturing while in the field. The inner core is also good for fish nets, with just overhand knots to make the mesh on with a shuttle and spacer.

Two weeks ago I made an eight strand macramé belt out of red, black, white and OD line. The OD at a minimum as line 2 and 7 are not knotted. I also added a fake (tied on) buckle of overhand hitches with all four colors."

**T**he Chinese, in addition to their priest cords, have given us lanyards of surpassing beauty which are best exemplified by their lantern lanyards. Undoubtedly in their homes are many other examples of this variety of knotting other than the lantern cords. But the lantern hangs in full view for all to see. Beside the lacery of these cords, in which many different kinds of knots are intertwined in a variety not equaled even in their priest cords, the Chinese have added color and texture. Tied in both silk and cotton, they are studded with semiprecious stones, glass and metal ornaments in the form of beads, disks and pendants.

I have never missed the opportunity to study Chinese lanyards wherever I have met them, but the Chinese have carried the art of knotting so far that there seems to be no end to their variety, and whenever I have found a good collection of Chinese knot work I have never failed to see something with which I was unfamiliar. When there isn't an entirely new knot, there is either a new twist to an old knot or a different way of combining two"

Clifford W. Ashley  
*The Ashley Book of Knots*



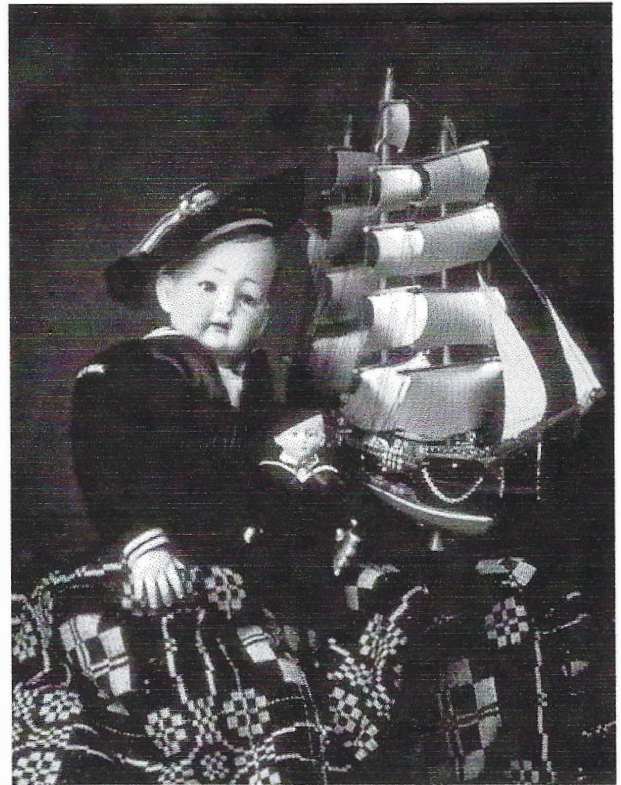
### KNOTTING EVENTS

**September 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>** - Tall Ships Festival.

Everyone is welcome to help out with our display at the Orange County Marine Institute at Dana Point, California. We will be right across from the Brig *Pilgrim* and it should prove to be a good show. The set-up time is 8:00 AM and we go till the string runs out!

**September 14<sup>th</sup>** - Monthly Knot Tyers Meeting.

**The meeting this month will be held at the OCMI at Dana Point.** Darrell McNurlan has set it up for us to meet at the Barn where the *Pilgrim* is moored. The meeting time will be from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. The rest of our meetings this season will take place in our regular spot in San Pedro at the Maritime Museum.



**KNOT NEWS**  
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