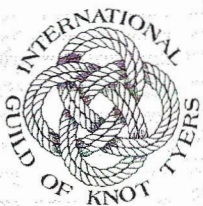


KNOT



NEWS

INTERNATIONAL GUILD OF KNOT TYERS - PACIFIC AMERICAS BRANCH

March 1999

Joseph Schmidbauer-Editor

Issue #16

Five-Fifty or Fight!

by

Staff Sergeant Jeffery Schmidbauer

Sergeant Schmidbauer is a photographer and video specialist with the U.S. Army. For a time he was one of a team of experts that went into Vietnam and Laos to try and recover the remains of servicemen left from the Vietnam War. The duty was arduous, the living conditions were primitive and the climate unforgiving.

He was asked by a curious Uncle, during some recent e-mail exchanges, if he had much to do with knots in the course of his duties. Here is his reply: "Yes, I do use knots quite a bit during my missions to SE Asia. In fact, knots have been *more* important at my current duty station than at any other so far in my military career. We use knots when we set up base camps, supply dumps and break areas near our excavation site. We tie off lines when we set up our 'Denver' tents. As well as pulling tarpaulin over the top of the tents to prevent rain from seeping inside. The knots we use to secure our shelters are basically the square knot, different slip knots and the sheepshank.

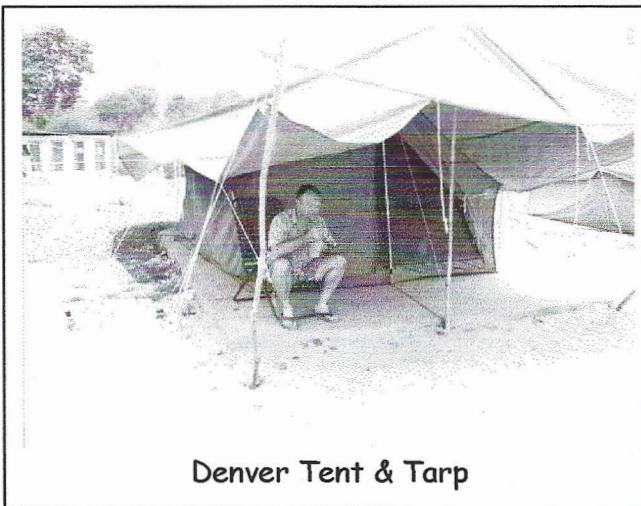
Have you heard of 5-50 cord? It is much like parachute cord. It is very soft but strong. It comes in OD green or white. We use the white because it is more easily seen so we don't trip over any anchoring lines



Laos Base Camp

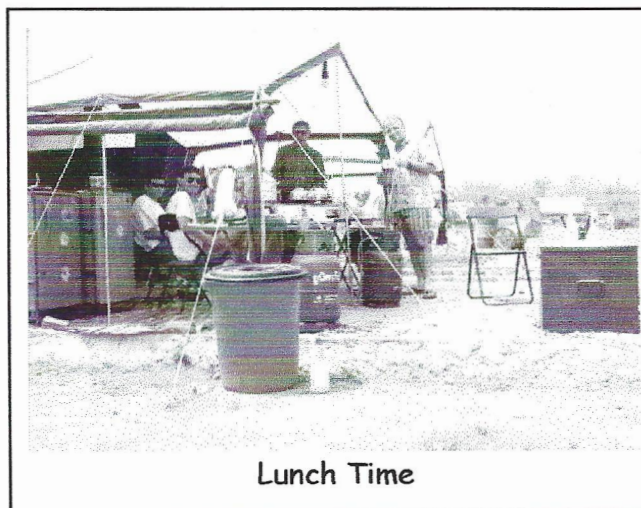
around the tent. When you tie knots with it, the cord maintains good knot integrity.

This is the type of line we use for securing the 'tarp' over the tents and also for creating shelters for the local workers who are hired for the excavations. 5-50 cord is like gold to the villagers! They always ask for or try to steal some for their own use. The Vietnamese are VERY resourceful! All they need to construct anything is 5-50 cord, bamboo and a machete. These local workers construct our chairs, benches and tables. They even construct the latrines; all we supply is the toilet seat and paper. Basically, the workers cut sections of bamboo into 'Lincoln logs' and lash them together. For table tops, they cut bamboo strips with notches on each end and lay them length-wise and these are lashed to a rectangular frame with half-cut bamboo underneath for support.



Denver Tent & Tarp

We also use knots and 5-50 cord to assist the workers in toting all boxes, crates and baggage from the landing zone to either our base camp or a site. The workers cut long bamboo poles (which, by the way, the Vietnamese Government is paid \$5.00 for each pole used) and tie the box or baggage to these poles. There is one man on each end of the pole with the load in between. Sometimes the load weighs up to 150 lbs but these skinny villagers, wearing nothing but flip-flops, can climb up and down mountains, wade through streams or follow rough dirt trails, all the while carrying these extreme loads. Memories of the Ho Chi Minh trail? No wonder they won the war!

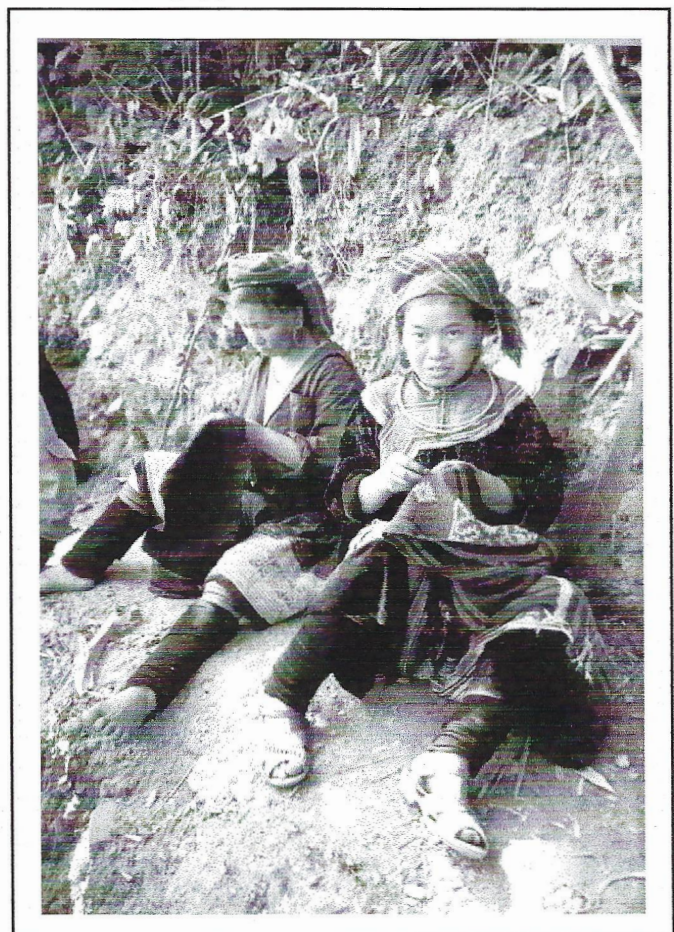


Lunch Time

Once an excavation site is selected and cleared, we section off the ground in 4x4 meter grid squares. Wooden stakes are pounded into each corner of the grid and

5-50 cord is used to rope off the squares. We do this to stay within the borders of the grid as we dig for the remains of MIA's, their personal effects, life support equipment, air craft debris, etc.

Our teams are augmented by experts from the Navy (Transport), Marines (Radio) and Air Force (Life Support Technician and Linguist). The Army supplies the Team Leader, Team Sergeant, Medic, Mortuary Affairs Specialists and Photographer. We usually have the Navy dude help us with the more difficult and complex knots. Who better than the Navy? ...except maybe the Coast Guard?"



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One of the most magnificent sights to be encountered at sea is a windjammer. To see the slender tower of sunlight canvas rise slowly out of the horizon, to pass the gigantic humming-bird and feel the coolness of her shadow as she glides by are unforgettable experiences. Her bell will toll with the swell, her lines will be like a gull's, and when she slowly sinks beyond the other sky-line, the young sailor will dream about the glorious days of sail and the romance that vanished with them.

The glory of the square-rigged ship has been immortalized by poets writing sonnets about long tricks at the wheel, and artists with beards singing sea-shanties in a jersey, accompanying themselves on a Spanish guitar. The advent of steam is considered to have been the advent of grime, trade unions, and class hatred between the bridge and the foc'sle. It has corrupted the salts of yore from iron men on wooden ships into wireless-operators in flowered dressing-gowns, idly fingering the keys, while their floating hotel sails itself by means of gyro compasses, consol and radar.

I sailed under canvas as a boy and in my memory the stalwart salts with the hearts of oak were moronic bipeds dangling in the branches of artificial trees in constant peril of their lives. The sea-shanties were ditties they were forced to sing by foreheadless bosuns, brandishing marlinespikes to mark time while pulling the ropes. I never heard it sung that my mother had a mermaid's tail, nor did I hear anybody wonder what to do with a drunken sailor. The chanties I heard were either descriptions of the cook's anatomy, or based on the fact that old captains have young wives.

So, though the memory of the extinct windjammer is one of the most precious of the sea, I should not advise the young sailor to try to turn it back to reality. It was a hard life, a dangerous life, and it lacked the redeeming presence of the engineers."

Jan De Hartog
A Sailor's Life

Branch Bits

Bryant Arrington of Tennessee continues the history of those mysterious Headhunter Rings [first discussed in KN#12] with some of the correspondence he has had from people in Irian Jaya. The first is from a missionary who has spent a lot of time in Irian Jaya.

Dear Bryant,

I missed a letter on your address at first try, but I just want to say that most finger rings and common arm bands in the Baliem area of highlands Irian Jaya are made not of bamboo but of the brown and very hard inner fiber from a fern plant there known in LGV Dani as *tikil*. I will try to locate the botanical name for you, but I am not sure the list I have includes it.

Sincerely,
Myron Bromley

Hi Bryant,

This is regarding the e-mail you posted at the Kabar Irian site? In the Yali area, and I think most of the Highlands, the material used for armbands and finger rings is taken from thin fibers from the stem of fern plants. Different ferns have different characteristic fibers. I can't really say which ferns specifically sorry! Orchid fibers are used to decorate the main ring or armband and is usually the yellow orchid fiber. The other colors like black are from soaking the fibers in mud. Or they leave the fiber in its natural color depending on the fern. It could be that the color is different depending on the age of the fern? I am not sure.

Another material used that I have seen is the leaf of the mountain pandanas leaves.

I will do my best to let you know as much about the rings as possible. Usually, they only take one fiber and they don't use a dowel. They start the ring off with a loose circle and tighten it as they weave.

They do use tools but they are simple. For armbands and finger rings they use a small needle or sliver of wood. This helps later in arm bands when they are doing the second

or third round. They use the tool to make an opening for the fiber.

The pattern is usually two over and two under for armbands. For armbands they start with different numbers of fibers depending on the final width they want. The narrowest armband usually has two fibers and the widest that I have seen is with twelve fibers. They tie the ends of the fibers off generally by looping them all once around and through the loop. They then weave the first template inside out, that way the knot is not in the way. After this they will weave in other fibers to give the armband color by using orchid fiber or now they use some plastic strings. The final step is turning the armband right side out and cut the knot off as close to the inner circle as possible.

The finger rings are usually only one fiber because they are so small.

When collecting the fibers, we collected them from short ferns approximately three feet high. But the ferns grow thick in large areas. To collect a fiber you break a long stem off of a plant and break open the outer hard covering. Inside the fibers run along the soft inner core. They are usually brown, light brown and break easily when you try and pull them away from the core. I think they are weak because they are moist; later they tend to be fairly strong. Some ferns you can get four fibers and others you can only get two. The collection of fibers doesn't kill the plant. Once all the stems of reasonable length are gone, or you have collected enough for your needs, it is left to grow.

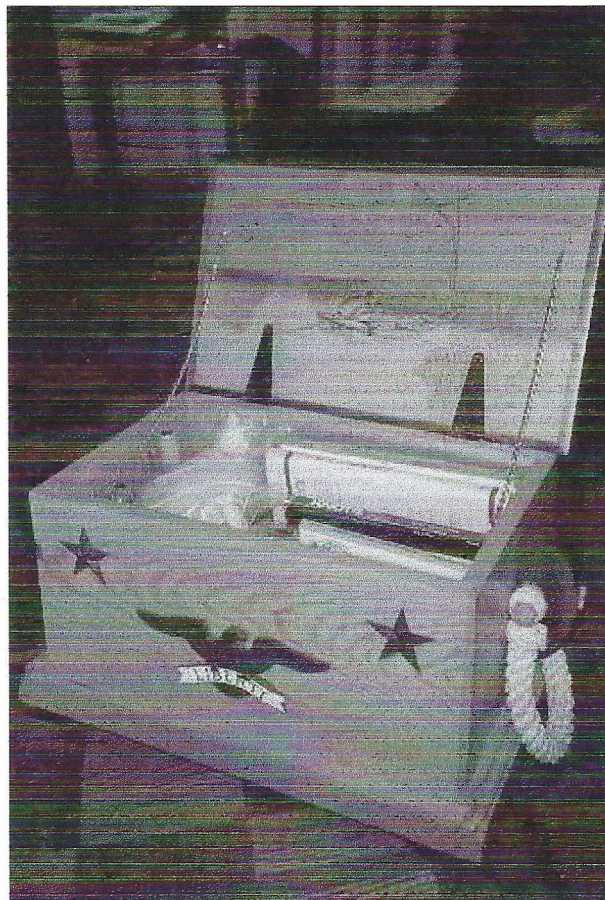
I hope this helps, I may be able to get answers from some questions from friends in Irian.

Nathan

From the Mailbag

Gary Sessions, Secretary of the IGKT Branch in Texas sent in this note: "Received your latest *Knot News* [KN #15] and enjoyed it. I particularly liked the lead article about the sea chest. I built one a few years ago and I'm proud of it. And although I'm proud

of the chest, I'm not too proud of the becketts. One of these days I'll make some really nice ones like Darrell made. You can tell him "Well done", for me.



Texas Sea Chest

Karl Bareuther in Germany wrote this letter: "On December 9th I joined the *Lili Marlene* for another cruise around the Canaries and I will leave her on April 17th in Palma de Mallorca.

Lots of work is coming up because by the end of May I will give an exhibition of my tools and ropework called "*Von Hundepints, Schweinsrücken und Neunschwänzinger Katz-Seemannsvolkskunst aus Tauwerk*" [Of Pointing, Cockscombing and Cat O'Nine Tails - Folk Art of the Sailor].

The show will run through the summer and might turn out pretty good."

Knotting Events

IGKT-PAB

The Pacific Americas Branch wants to host a knotting extravaganza to help celebrate the coming Millennium. We would like to hold it during the summer of the Year 2000. The membership is invited to come up with ideas on how best to proceed with this idea. Where would you like it to take place? What kind of eye catching event would work best? Tying 2000 Knots? Please give it some thought and send your ideas in to the Editor. The Millennium is not that far away and we need all the time in-between to make this Extravaganza worth attending and remembering.

IGKT-NAB

The North American Branch is planning a Knotter's Meeting this summer in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The dates are August 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th.

The highlight will be a luncheon scheduled at the Ashley Estate on Monday the 9th.

Arrangements have been made with the Hampton Inn of Fall River/Westport. A block of 60 rooms is being held for the IGKT-NAB. The room rate is \$93.00 per night for 1-4 guests per room. The phone number is (508) 675-7185. *When making your reservations you must refer to the IGKT-NAB block of rooms.* This block of rooms will be held until July 5th, 1999.

Knot Another Birthday?!

By Lindsey Philpott

Last year I succumbed to my fiftieth birthday, not without some lack of grace and a long serious look at whether all my peers have at least some gray hair on their heads or in their beards. I am actually finding the acceptance of being an older man to be a great joy, because with the advancing years comes an ever ready supply of advice that I can give to younger people whom I meet and can talk with. As part of my birthday celebrations, my wife and family decided to take me to a restaurant of my choosing, with some of my nearest and

dearest friends. I decided upon the Sir Winston's restaurant on the Queen Mary in Long Beach, where my wife and I were wed, nigh those many years since. My wife provided this treat for my birthday, bless her, and my sons duly asked what they could get me. I, as usual, had no idea. So I asked them to get me something that I would like. I thought that this would leave open the door for some surprises, and I was not disappointed.

My eldest son, Nick had decided that, because I had every single sailing book known to man, he would get me a book without which no library would be complete. As an avid sailor and a US Coastguard licensed captain with thousands of miles under my feet in craft both great and small, and as an avid bibliophile, I relished the thought that he had found me a book that would eloquently fill my shelves. He got for me the "Sailing for Dummies" that he saw I was without! That brought me down to earth with a resounding thump, and I realized that I probably still have a lot to learn about sailing, not least about human nature's joy in lampooning the celebrated. I took great joy in that lesson, but my greatest joy was yet to be.

My younger son, Ben, had secretly been delving into my copies of ABOK (English and US versions) and had found therein a selection of knots, both simple and complex. He had secretly taken my Ashley's and, without any prior training, made 50 knots from his instructions, wrapped them in a bag as a gift and ceremoniously given them to his Dad as one for every year of his life celebrated. That brought a lump to my throat, to think of the effort over several weeks that he had taken from his busy schedule of school, skateboarding and sunshine, to secretly and very accurately and beautifully portray for me something near and dear to my heart.

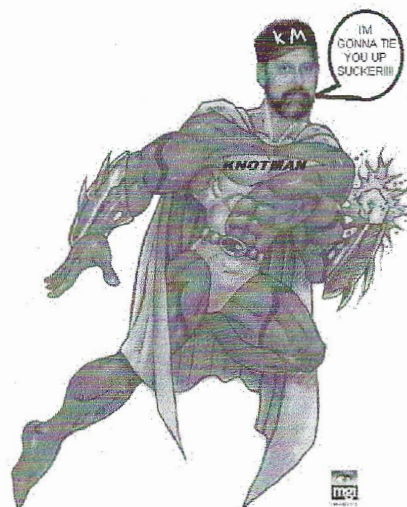
My thanks especially to my wife for such a memorable birthday gift, and particularly to my sons for their very thoughtful and prescient gifts that would make my celebrations more wonderful than ever!

Meeting Schedule

The Pacific Americas Branch has monthly meetings in the Los Angeles Maritime Museum in San Pedro, California. We meet in the rear classroom of the Museum.

They are on the second Tuesday of the month from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. This seasons meetings are slated for March 9th, April 13th and May 11th. The Annual General Meeting will be on Friday, June 25th.

Hope to see you there!



KNOT NEWS

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