

Knot



News

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Nœud de Capelage Jury Rig Mast Knot – Ornament or Utilitarian? – by Charles Hamel

Some doubts are floating about over the actual use of *le nœud de capelage* a.k.a. the Jury Rig Mast Knot as this knot is construed in some quarters as “only of ornamental value”. My “what I think I know” – do not dare to write “knowledge” – is contrary to that opinion. In the past I have encountered oral traces of the actual use of this sort of knot in very small fishing embarkations to erect and steady a short mast. It seems this “types of knots” (there are some variations) were/are used indeed in small embarkations to set the mast at each *sortie en mer*, at each going out to sea to fish. To wit: on a *doris*/dory the mast can be set and dismounted by a man alone, even at sea. The ease of setting or casting the small mast seems to have made it viable in daily use and not only for “emergency repair”, but no writing or photography, not even an old post card, of attested historical value ever came my way.

In my mind map uncritical, as in unexamined, outright, a priori rejection is as bad as uncritical acceptance; discarding oral would put us back to the first incipient tribe since, for most of humanity existence has only been oral and even today that is certainly the way (in terms of the number of people concerned and not in terms of volume of information transmitted) in the world as a whole. I am ready to believe that the risk of being taken for a ride is as high in *written* (be it paper or

electrons) transmission, as in *oral*. Not only do I believe that, I go as far as to think it though I do not know it. ;-)
One of those ‘what I know but cannot prove’ sort of thing. Saying that oral lore is useless *contes de bonne femmes*/ “old wives tales” seems to me a sterile stand. After all much of the same could be levied at ABOK which many a time is only registering oral lore either directly or having been previously printed but coming essentially from oral transmission and still tainted by this original sin. Original sin is to my mind a fallacy even if a commodity.

Robert Graves in *Greek Myths* has extensively shown that culturally established myths are always deeply rooted in objective reality. A very recent example about not discarding *les contes de bonne femmes* without a thorough investigation: there is at the moment a new effort by biologists to reappraise what they had previously discarded as fairy tales from stupidly ignorant reporters. They are discovering that they were wrong to have relegated it in the junk realm and are finding realities that could very well be the root of those fairy tales: griffon that they have now recognized as strikingly similar to a Protoceratops skeleton; the Cyclops that could be inspired by a skull of a prehistoric elephant... Of course myth creation and maintenance rest on many other elements than simple “germs for the idea”. For the seed to germinate and grow to full height the soil must be right and the care too.

I am not losing sight that there seems to exist a sad endemic tendency in the knotting literature to be a bit quick and dirty about reference, biography and the chaining of historical evidence, with much confusion or not enough precaution to differentiate when collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. Abrupt assertion in lieu of proof is not a rarity, not to mention taking much of one’s inspiration in another author’s book without

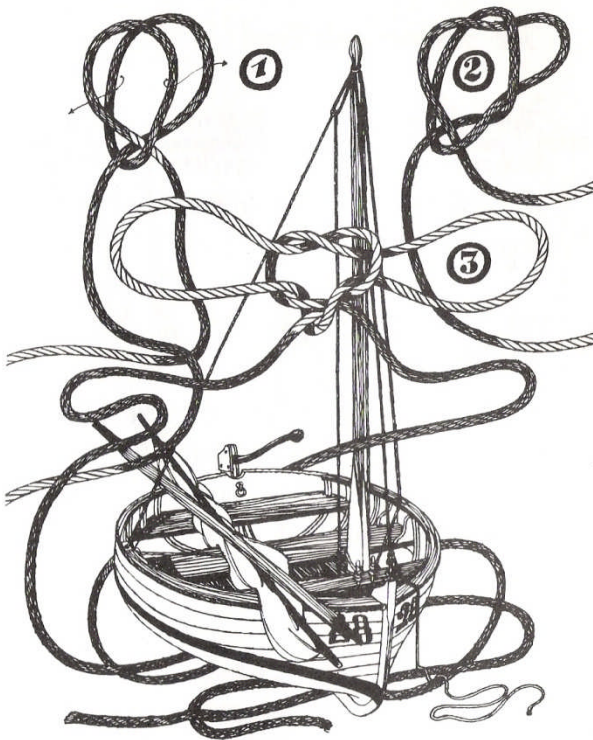
really acknowledging the fact. So that in the end what could be erroneously thought as multiple sources corroborating each other, resolve from one unique source reproduced many times.

The opposition between the two interpretations: Ornamental Only vs. Utilitarian led me to try and investigate the matter.

Literature

My finding in books I have personally had on hand.

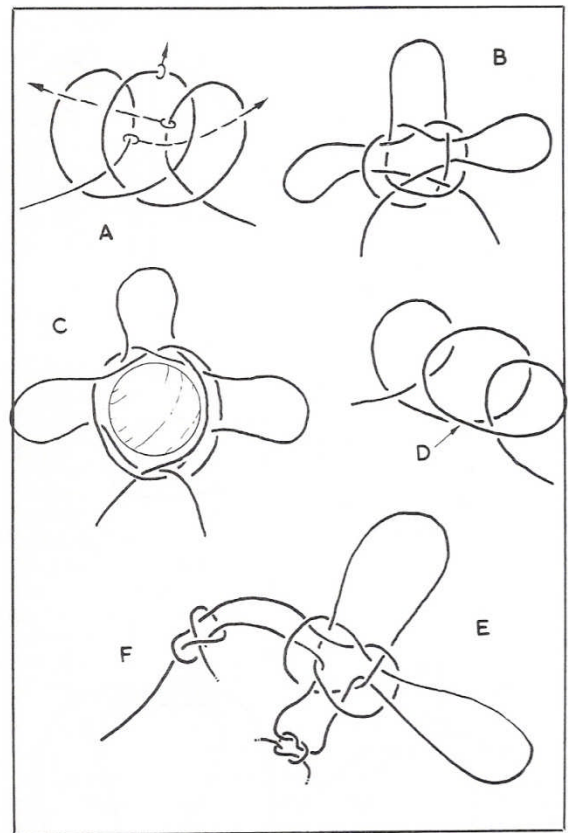
•Marc P. BERTHIER *L'art Des Nœuds* published in la collection VOILES GALLIMARD le savoir marin, show only an illustration with these accompanying words: "Il est tout à fait utile lors d'un démâtage. (Je n'irai pas jusqu' à dire que c'est pour le plaisir de la faire qu'Eric TABARLY a laissé un mat dans l'Océan Atlantique et un dans l'Océan Pacifique, mais en tout cas, lui sait le faire.)"/"It is extremely useful when you are dismasted. (I will not go as far as saying that it is just for the pleasure of tying this knot that Eric TABARLY left one mast behind in the Atlantic Ocean and another in the Pacific Ocean, but he, anyway, knows how to tie it."



Other publications show this sort of knot without precise and detailed attestation of its actual use.

•R.C. ANDERSON, *The Rigging of Ships in the Days of the Spritsail Topmast, 1600-1720*. (In my opinion it is the ABOK on rigging, a mine for model ship builders: Danish-Dutch-English-French are addressed. So who would want a "repair" in a perfect model, unless making a diorama of a distressed ship?)

•Percy BLANDFORD in *Practical Knots and Ropework*: 3 full pages for the topic (1 of text, 2 of drawings). "Temporary mast 3 or 4 loops to which stays or supporting ropes can be attached, the greater the load, the greater will be the grip on the mast. Some other knots of similar formation are primarily ornamental and not as effective for practical application."



•George BIDDLECOMBE though writing on *The Art of Rigging* has nothing to express.

•William BRADY, *The Kedge-Anchor* in note 315 gives the details: 'TO RIG A JURY-MAST'. "Take a spare spar, the largest on board, a main-topmast for instance, and launch the head over the night-head, the heel resting against the stump of the old mast; put on the cross-trees and bolsters, fit the rigging and stays from hawsers, and hook a couple of tackles from the jury-mast head - which take to the sides and haul taut; hook another, which take well aft; lash the heel of the stump to prevent slipping, and raise the mast with the after

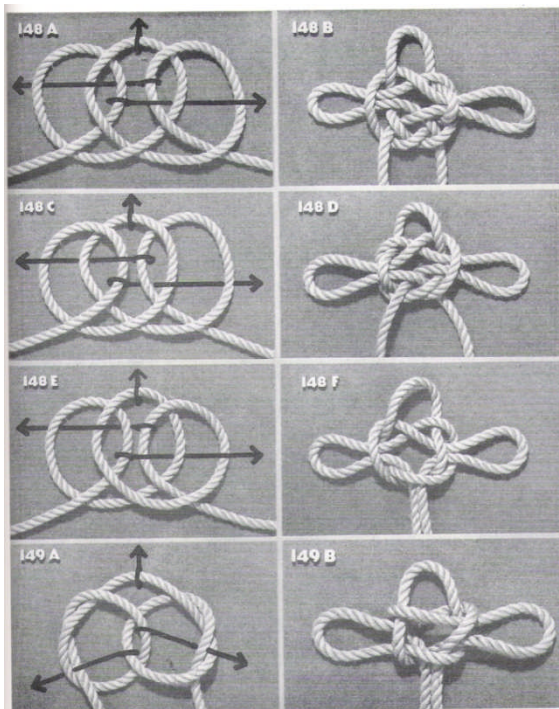
purchase, tending the stays and pendant-tackles; when up, reeve the lanyards, set up the rigging and stays. Cleat and lash the heel securely. Ship the cap, send up a topgallant-mast for the topmast, fit a topsail yard for a lower yard, and a topgallant yard for a topsail yard, and so on."

Sound really practical.

- Richard H. DANA jr. like George S. NARES have not broached the subject.

- Cyrus L. DAY just gives the "recipe" on the Mast Head Knot or Jury Knot and mentions the Shamrock Knot or Japanese Masthead Knot with this comment: "It is primarily a decorative knot". There is no qualifier given to the Jury Knot.

(Dan Lehman playing with ease and talent the part of the skeptic doubter added: "To be specific, you must mean *The Art of Knotting and Splicing*; in a small pamphlet *Knotting and Splicing* (1953), p. 30, Day says (admits), "Whether [it] has actually been used... I cannot say.")



- Hervey Garrett SMITH in *The Art of the Sailor* wrote about a Jury Knot, but of another sort. There is nothing in *The Marlinespike Sailor*.

- Chas. L. SPENCER, *Knots, Splices and Fancy Work*, 3 full pages (147-150) for Jury Knot Mats: "The basis of these is the Jury Knot. There are a number of variants..." He presented them with 4 and 5 loops and used to make mats. P. 165: a 3 loop Jury

Knot: "The Jury Knot is useful when a jury mast is to be rigged, as the loops form a means of attaching the necessary support to the mast. The center (Fig 331) is slipped over the masthead and the weight brought on the stays tightens it and holds it in position on the mast..." The wording he used leaves no doubt about actual use at sea. He clearly separated the ornamental from the utilitarian. Could it be the use of this knot as a pattern for a mat that led to the "it is only an ornamental knot" stand?

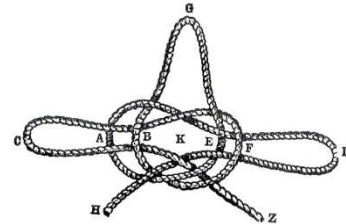
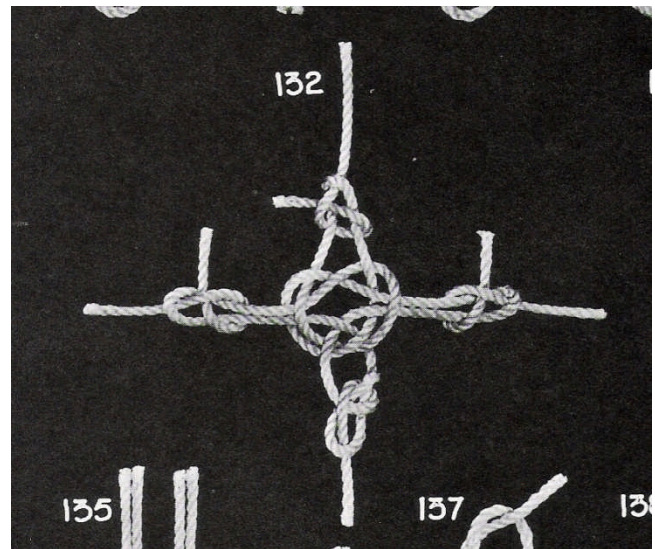


Fig. 354.

- Brion TOSS does not show it in *The Rigging Handbook*.

- Raoul GRAUMONT and John HENSEL, *The Encyclopedia of Knots and Rope Work* on page 75, plate 31, figure 132 shows a "Rigged Jury Mast Knot". There are also a few others pictured but this is the best one in my view but I tend to regard this book as only a collection of 'pretty pictures' with no real substance in the text.

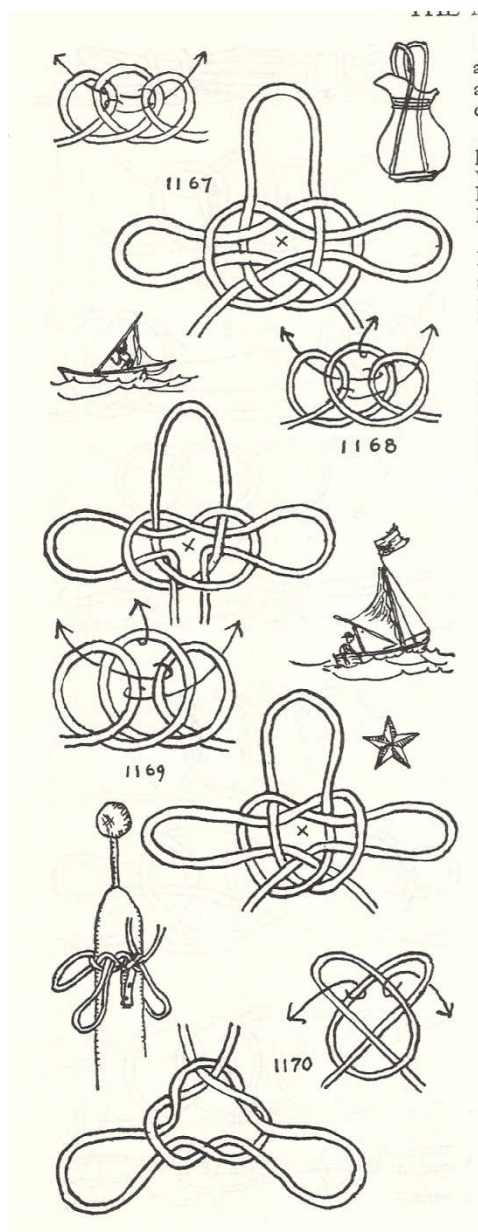


- Gordon PERRY, *Knots*, writes on page 187, "To make a guy or stay attachment for a temporary mast. This knot makes an ideal point to secure three or four lines or stays to a temporary mast. The knot only provides attachment points for guy lines, it is not capable of gripping the mast. Therefore it should be secured to the mast above an existing fixing - such as a horizontal yard (or crosstree), a transom square lashed or in a

groove cut into the mast – so that it will not slide down the mast when in use. Guy ropes or stays can be attached to the loops with a Sheet Bend. If a fourth stay or guy line is required, make another loop by tying the two working ends together with a Fisherman's Knot."

•Clifford W. ASHLEY, *The Ashley Book of Knots* (page 212/#1169) "The sailor's MASTHEAD or JURY MAST KNOT, which is employed practically as a temporary strap to which stays are led, when erecting a jury mast or derrick. Three hitches are made..."

Sounds quite affirmative about the actual use.



•Lindsey PHILPOTT, *Knots – A Complete Guide*, on page 39, the Jury Mast Knot is classed in the "Loops". "A life-saver at sea in an emergency, the Jury Mast Knot may be used simply to replace a fitting at the head of the mast that will normally receive shrouds and stays. When a mast is broken and has to be re-stepped on deck, this knot forms the attaching loops and a fourth set of lines for the remaining stays when tightened around the head of the new replacement spar. As a decorative knot it can be readily formed from this simple method. The knot is known as a Pitcher Knot when it is used to hold and carry a jar or pitcher."

•The famous *Ecole de Voile des Glénans* in Brittany in *Le Cours Des Glénans* (1990 printing) neither describe nor depict it. In this school they teach you not to go into harms way and lose a mast and anyway there is the guardian angels of the SNSM (*Société Nationale de Sauverage en Mer/ National Sea Rescue Society*: volunteer mariners of enormous courage.)

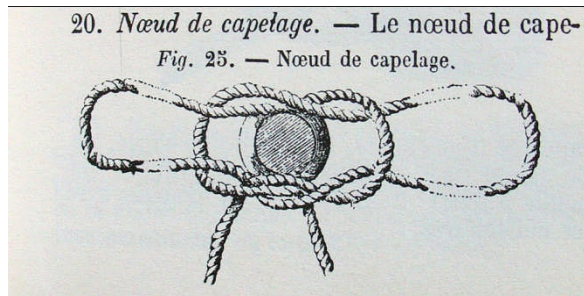
•One publication *Guide des Nœuds et du Matelotage* by *Le Chasse Marée* give the knot as of actual use, but it is a made bit ex abrupto, without reference. *La Chasse Marée* was in the past reputed for the quality of its research, though it seems that in some quarters, opinion has changed about the present-days publication. Some of their publications are the sole historical remnants of what were our fishing activities and methods in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

•Robert H. GRAVES in *Knots and Lashings*, (page 7) gives 2 small drawings of Jury Knot or True Lover's Knot. "This knot is primarily for a mast head, to form loops by means of which the mast may be stayed. It is called a jury knot because in sailing ship days it was often used to rig a temporary or jury mast."

•VERRILL and VERRILL-McCANN (p 136-137) gave 2 types for the Jury Mast Knot, one for topmast [2 bights] and one for lower mast [3 bights] (with fishy drawing) say: "The Jury Mast Knot though they may have had actual use may be classed as fancy work". Very uncertain on both counts how they felt in my opinion and expressed more opinion than fact." The next sentence certainly sounded a bit *Manuel du Gabier*-like: "The idea in them is that when one is rigging a jury mast with a hawser one does not wish to cut, the mast goes through the center of the knot, the two side bights form back stays (in the French it is *hauban* not back stays as *hauban*=shroud and *pataras*=stay in French not at all the same 'part'.)

•In the quite official *Manuel Du Gabier* (published in 1875 by order of the Ministry) there is no doubt that this official French Navy Manual put it as something that it was compulsory to have mastered to get a *gabier* brevet.

The *Manual Du Gabier* gives this sort of knot among others (p 13, fig 25) *Nœud de Capelage* with this use: “Le nœud de capelage s’emploie pour soutenir un mâtereau en haubans et en étais, avec une aussière ou un faux-bras que l’on ne veut pas couper. Les deux bouts forment l’étais; les deux doubles, les haubans. Si l’aussière n’avait pas une longueur suffisante on ferait le nœud de manière que bouts fussent assez long former étais et l’on crocherait palans ou caliornes dans deux doubles pour faire les haubans.”



This is 19th century maritime French and not easy to translate without losing its ‘flavour’. I am going to try with the help of my two specialized dictionaries, one 18th and one 20th century, revised in the 21st. “The ‘rigging knot’ is used to support a small mast with shrouds and stays, using a hawser or preventer stay (or preventer brace i.e. a ‘false-arm’) which one does not want to cut. The two ends form the stays; the loops (the two double), the shrouds. Should the hawser not have a sufficient length, the knot would be made so that the ends are long enough to form the stays, and two pendant tackles (or *caliornes*) would be ‘hooked’ in the two double, to make the shrouds.”

Having reached this point I decided to investigate further if not deeper. I then set to interrogate by postal mail *Le Service de la Marine* (SHM = French National Marine Historical Services) stating what I had been up to this point and giving them a drawing, plus some other bodies that I thought could be of help:

- *Marine Nationale*: CHERBOURG (Normandy)/ BREST (Brittany)/ ROCHFORT (Atlantic Coast)/ TOULON (Mediterranean).
- *Le Chasse-Marée* (literally “The Tide-Chaser”) in Douarnenez (Brittany).

- *Le Musée Maritime de Douarnenez* (Douarnenez Maritime Museum).
- *Le Musée de la Marine à Paris*.

- *La Société Française de l’Histoire de la Marine*/French Marine History Society.

• SHM Cherbourg (Normandy) replied: “To answer your letter in reference I am pleased to inform you that the book by G. Jaffrin, Y. Goubert, M. Philippe, *Guide Des Nœuds Et Du Matelotage (Le Chasse-Marée/Armen* 2002, p. 48) archived in my service under #85314, give *Nœud de la Capelage* double and triple and confirm that they were used for mast repair after sustaining damage. Nevertheless my service is not able to give you the details about which of the *nœuds de capelage* are used and which ship has used them...”

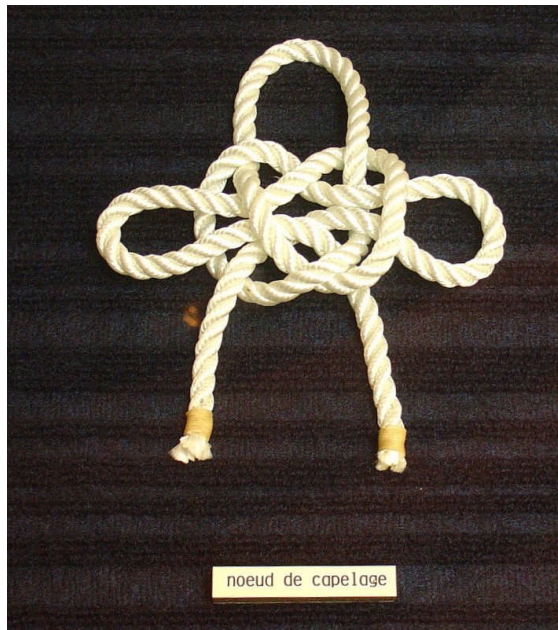
• SHM Brest (Brittany) answered: “By mail received on 2006, May 17th, you asked me about two different types of knots. Regretfully I must inform you that *Le Service Historique de la Défense -Département Marine* (Defense Historical Service – Navy Department) in Brest does not hold documents that will permit you to further your research. I advise you to make contact with *Les Editions du Chasse-Marée* (Abri du Marin. BP 159, 29171 Douarnenez Cedex) that may contain information of interest to you...”

• SHM Toulon (Mediterranean) responded with the silliest military answer possible. They sent me the *Règlement Intérieur* the “Internal Regulations” of the Service saying they are there only to keep the archives in good order and open the library!

• No answers from SHM Rochefort, French Marine History Society, the *Le Musée de la Marine* in Paris, the Douarnenez Museum or *Le Chasse-Marée*.

The silence of of *Le Chasse-Marée* was not a surprise since *Le Chasse-Marée* is no longer what it was in the past. It has been in financial dire straits for a number of years. In spite of a costly publication they were unable to cover the costs of researching and publishing and have been ‘bought’ by a professional publisher: *Glénat*. Still *La Chasse-Marée* was in the past reputed for being thorough in its research when doing a feature. Some of their publications are the sole historical remnants of what were our fishing activities and methods in the 19th and early 20th century. Usually historians and archivists – even military ones – follow the same training courses and are “fussy” persons about sources in general, so if SHM kept this publication it must be after evaluation of its value. Or so I hope! I had entertained hopes that a ship log would provide details of repairs done after sustaining damage in exploratory

navigation. The contacts with *Service Historique de la Marine* did not bring proof of actual use and did not further my knowledge any. Still it must be kept in mind that absence of proof is not proof of absence!



I then set to contact a person knowledgeable in maritime affairs: John Harland. He was very swift in answering and quite friendly: "This is an interesting question, and one might imagine examples exist in 18th and 19th century logbooks. However, supposing there are for instances which refer to this sort of circumstances, I fear they probably would confine themselves to a broad statement like 'Morning: rigged jury fore mast'. The only place I can imagine that one might find confirmation that the Jury Rig Mast Knot was actually used for this purpose, would be in the personal journal of a boatswain or similar person interested in the technical details. The type of oral reference to which you refer is also a possible source." John made reference to *Le Chasse Marée* too and said he would put the question to the Marine History Information Exchange Group and he mentioned Des Pawson and his museum. I also contacted Frank Charles Brown a.k.a 'Bowline' about my quest and this was his first response: "Only found one book in my collection with illustration that shows knot actually being located on a mast/spar – Eric Fry *Knots and Ropework*. I have not read anything about the actual use in limited number of books relating to

sea stories – I did spend an interesting half hour with a Russian bosun comparing methods of tying the Bowline and he was demonstrating a Jury Knot to ship visitors – so assume the knot is/was taught in that navy.

"Posed the Jury Mast question to two colleagues; Thursday is *May Queen* day: gathering of old boat people on old boat. Neil is also a naval historian and told of the knot being used to load cannon balls. Make the construction of suitable size, sit the ball in the middle and pass hauling line through loops. Maybe the tail could act as control guy from below? This would make sense why knot could be part of seaman's standard stock of knots. Possible use for jury mast could be just a bonus use. C'est logique?"

I made my own experiment with *noeud de capelage* using a 19.2 kg (42 lb) granite boulder I brought back from Brittany some years ago. It worked. No problem with slipping inside the knot itself. I gave it some half dozen sharp up and down jerky moves. It did not fall but I would not recommend it to put on board a full ammunition count for a first line vessel. It was very time consuming to use – have to arrange it carefully – plus the pendulum motion makes going from the quay to the deck a risky endeavor. I do not see naval minds going for that sort of thing in a run of the mill manner.

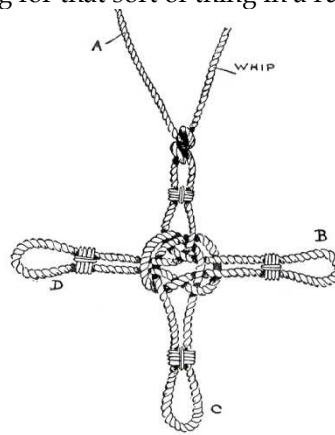


Fig. 355.

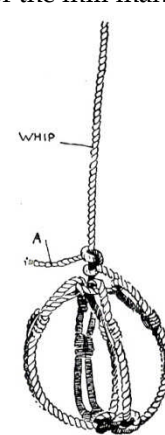


Fig. 356.

In summing up I would say that there is much evidence in favor of the actual use of this knot. Persistent oral lore has it that in time past they used some such knots but, for the unconvinced, who find this to be all empty words, there is much hard evidence as well (as I have demonstrated) in the written form. There is no doubt in my mind *Le Noeud de Capelage* is a practical tool indeed, which also has aesthetics appeal for some. Could it be also be that the use of this sort of knot to do mats plus the look-sort-of-alike of the Shamrock Knot or Japanese Masthead Knot that established the legend of the ornamental use only?

What was once Sundered and Undone Now is Whole - the Two made One

by Bob Solon

Late last century I was given the opportunity to use a 19th century lathe and with it I was able to turn some Lucas County wormy oak. I experimented making fids. Although it wasn't one of my favorites at the time, the fid pictured below became so.



The SS *John W. Brown* came to Toledo for rivet replacement, Toledo being one of the few ports in the U.S. still capable of doing riveting. Go figure. I volunteered to help during the refit.

One of my jobs was to replace the monkey ropes over one of the life boats. I was ill prepared for the job having only brought a couple of fids. Not to worry: I had made my fids. Therefore, they must be indestructible. And so they were until I attempted to use one to pry open a crusty old knot. At that point I found out why marlinspikes were invented. What resulted was a compound fracture of my fid. Painful, yes, but not physically so: thankfully, the old sailor working with me never said a word. I was torqued big time. The only reason I didn't pitch the fractured fid over the side was because we were in a graving dock. The riveters were working on the hull below me.

About six weeks later I found the fractured fid on the workbench gathering dust. All those feelings bubbled to the surface again. Blasted piece of junk! The fid looked like the letter "Y". A revival didn't seem possible but I decided to give it a try.

C-clamps, rubber bands and glue slowly forced the "Y" back into something resembling an "I". When the glue dried the result was one truly ugly

fid. Rubber bands were entombed in rock-hard glue and the fracture line did not look like it would ever hold. When I had my accident the doctors used pins to hold my leg bones in place. Maybe that would work here? For my leg they used stainless steel screws; for the fid I used brass escutcheon pins. I drilled four holes in the fid. All were at different angles in the hope that the pins would work against themselves. More glue. The fid got uglier.

A metal file eliminated the protruding escutcheon pins. Rough sandpaper tore out the embedded rubber bands. And so the serious sanding began. Some say that white oak can never truly be sanded smooth. I started with #50 grit sandpaper and finally finished with #2000 grit paper. Because of all the sanding, the point is lighter than the handle. Several applications of paste wax finished the job. The black dots are worm holes that go all the way through the handle.



Over-all Length:	12 ½ inch	[32 cm]
Tip Length:	7 inch	[17.8 cm]
Taper:	1.107	
Diameter Fid:	1 ½ inch	[3.8 cm]
Diameter of Pommel:	2 ⅛ inch	[5.4 cm]



A Cat from Cord

by Frank Brown

One of the first animals I developed was a dog, and I was quite pleased with the result. Lots of people also have expressed pleasure with my creation sufficiently to order one, i.e. putting their money where their mouth is. However there are a few people who think cats are the acme of animals, including my daughter-in-law. So I had to work out some sort of construction for these poor folk. I tried to emulate the classic cat on the mat pose, but with no success. The result resembled nothing remotely like a feline. So the next option was the sphinx pose, and I had more success with this. As the legs did not have to support the weight, I could use the same technique I used to make tails for 'roos and rats.

I am still not 100% happy with the resulting beast, but perhaps a knoter with a greater affection for moggies than I would be more successful.

There is a tutorial on KHWWW that shows how I made a dog.

