

Knot



News

International Guild of Knot Tyers – Pacific Americas Branch

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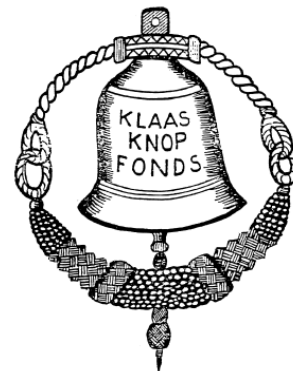
Issue # 73

The Klaas Knop Foundation Pieter van de Griend

Prologue

Along the Dutch, German and Danish coast a gently curved string of beautiful sandy islands slices a rim off the North Sea to form a sheltered coastal wetland, the so-called Waddenzee. From the mainland you can actually walk to a number of these inhabited offshore sandy dunes. However, crossing the marshes at low tide you will be in for an adrenaline-driven race against the clock. It is smarter to catch a ferry *to* and escape *from* the isles. The West Frisian Islands, as they are named, have a long-time connection to Dutch maritime history. Their inhabitants were quite active in whaling. Remnants of that glorious past are still to be found by any inquisitive researcher visiting these windy isles. The great seafarer Willem Barentz (1550-1597) originated from Terschelling. The Barents Sea and the Svalbard mining town of Barentsburg were named after him.

A less famous Terschellinger son was former stockholder Klaas Knop (1872-1952). With saddened heart he witnessed the island rapidly depopulate a century ago. He saw the young islanders fleeing to the mainland or into alcohol abuse. In an attempt to offer the juveniles a useful wintertime activity he started the foundation which came to bear his name "*Klaas Knop Fonds*" (**KKF**). In this article I would like to present some fascinating knotting strands, which have become intertwined with Terschellinger social history, by sharing my Klaas Knop Foundation experiences.



In the summer of 1972 I cycled to Terschelling for a camping vacation. I spent a fortnight in the farming community of Oosterend, which is situated close to the village of Hoorn. One fine day I chanced to visit the local library and discovered a large collection of knotting boards, which were said to belong to Klaas Knop. The clearly configured knot types, in their neatly seized ropelets, were handsomely nailed to the boards. The structures were presented replete with hand-painted wooden name tags. It left quite an impression on me. All these rope-working techniques were different and actually had names! In the years to come I occasionally bumped into the Klaas Knop *name* in the Dutch knotting literature, but it was not till 1986 that I undertook an effort to get in touch with the knotboard manufacturers. My chance letter was addressed to "*Klaas Knop, Terschelling Netherlands*". Amazingly it found its way to the group and triggered a prompt response. A big box of tarry knotting samples arrived at my doorstep in the Faroe Islands [6]. Since 1972 I have revisited the islands twice – both times to meet KKF-members during inspiring knotting venues. These talks and previous writings form the basis for this article [7], [10], [12].

The Person Klaas Knop

In the 1934 image on the next page, Klaas Knop is standing to the left, vigorously ignoring the camera, doing his own thing. The image comes from the KKF-archives tended by Gerard Ruyg.

If you check out the Terschellinger telephone directory you will find quite a few instances of the Knop surname. Our Klaas Knop certainly was a real Terschellinger. He was born there on August 12th 1872. He married a Terschellinger girl by the name of Antje Rab (1883-1952) in May 1906 and they had a daughter Margareta. Klaas Knop died on September 9th 1952 and he lies buried, with his spouse, in the grave-yard of West-Terschelling. Part of his life was spent at sea as storeholder for the Royal Dutch Shipping Company (KNSM). After a while he swallowed the anchor, returned home and settled as janitor of "Ons Huis". It was around 1924 when, together with his colleague, Mr. Schol, who was an AA-member, he decided to offer young islanders an alternative to the hideous publife.

He started off modestly with his rope work classes in the island's capital, West-Terschelling. It was not till 1933 when Dr W.A. van Dieren and Reverend J.W. van Swigchem became involved that the classes got the organized format they have nowadays [9, pp248-249]. A decade later the decision to start a foundation was taken. A knot of men assembled on the doorstep of Solicitor Willem Flamman, deposited 1400 silver Dutch guilders, and officially started *Het Klaas Knop Fonds* [13]. To this day the foundation takes pride in its independence, receiving neither governmental nor municipal subsidies.

Originally KKF had commercial as well as educational goals. There was a split in activities shortly after World War II. Commercial operations went by the name of "Terschellinger Zeemans Handwerk". It was a factory that made its own rope, which formed the basis of a string of products, such as mats, wastepaper baskets, belts, brushes and shopping bags. They had machines for laying rope and sewing the mats. At some point in time the business moved to Harlingen on the mainland. It is unclear what became of it, but the educational KKF-part stayed on Terschelling and continued to teach its "schiemanswerk".

What is Schiemanswerk?

Before speaking about KKF, let us take a closer look at their core business. In Dutch the KKF organization stands for the promotion of a skill called "schiemannen", but what exactly is that?

Etymologically speaking the Dutch verb "schiemannen" and the related noun "schiemanswerk" are obscure words. Their origin and history is unclear [11]. In ABOK-parlance the topic is best covered by "practical marlinspike seamanship" [1, p511]. However, the concept covers more than that.

The noun "schieman" derives from the male Middle-Dutch noun "shipman" (Schip + Man), which means "ship" + "man". It was used from the 12th to the 15th century. From medieval days onwards a number of languages and dialects eventually formed Dutch. One finds the forms "shipman (scibman)", which transforms into "schimman (schymman, scymman)". The meaning went unchanged. An indication for this can be found in Kiliaan's *Etymologium Theutonice Linguae*. Kiliaan was a Flemish linguist employed by Plantijn an Antwerp-based major printing shop since 1558. In his dictionary he described the vocabulary of his own dialect, but also mentioned many words, which had become obsolete by his day. He investigated words from other countries, such as Vlaanderen, Holland and Friesland [8]. The word "schie" appears to be derived from "to separate". It is unknown when the words "schimman" and "schieman" emerge. Linguist Kiliaan did not have the word "schieman", but does offer "schimman" in the first 1589 edition of his work. The 17th century Dutch playwright Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Bredero (1585-1618) in "*Het Moortje*" has a "schieman"-character [4, p24].

There is a link between the Dutch and French words "esquiman" and "schieman", which can be traced back to 1702 Nicholas Aubin [2].

Esquiman: C'est le nom qui les Hollandais donnent à l'officier Marinier qu'on appelle quartier-maitre. C'est celui qui a l'oeil particulierement sur le service des pompes et qui est comme l'aide du Maitre et Contre-maitre d'un vaisseau; aussi se sert – on quelquefois du mot d' Esquiman pour dire second Contre-maitre.

Esquiman: This is the name which the Dutch give to the naval officer we would call quartermaster (?). In particular he is responsible for the service of the pumps and helps the Mate and Boatswain of a vessel. Also one occasionally makes use of the word "Esquiman" to denote Second Boatswain.



The *contre-maitre* (fr) = *hoogbootsman* (nl) = boatswain (en). Hence the “*esquiman*” is the right hand of this person and is therefore called “*hoog-bootsmansmaat*”, or second boatswain. In the major French dictionaries (Larousse, Robert) the word “*esquiman*” no longer occurs and it appears to have become obsolete in that language. Likewise the Dutch nouns “*schipman*” and “*schimman*” are no longer used.

In ancient German one may find “*schifmann*” and “*schefmann*”. Later, since Luther, one finds “*schiemann*”. For the activities of the “*schiemann*” there is a Scandinavian equivalent in the word “*Sømandsarbejde*” The latter can be translated relatively painlessly into “sailor’s work”. *Schiemanswerk* does not offer that ease of translation, as few Dutch military naval men want to be associated with their Dutch merchant naval counterparts.

In résumé, the word “*schiemann*” has traceable 16th century origins in the Dutch language. In the past a “*schiemann*” was a lower ranking naval officer, who was responsible for the rigging. In the merchant naval setting it is a crew member doing sailor rope work duties. The Dutch language has retained some “*schiemann*”-related proverbs, which are beyond the scope of this article. They are, however, indicative of a strong and obvious culture-historical component. In the Netherlands all rope working activities are still referred to as “*schiemanswerk*”, which is what occupies KKF. Let us see how Klaus Knop set up his organization.

KKF Organization

In 1946 KKF policy was written down and an organizational structure formalized. In administrative terms, the KKF has a council, which consists of about 10 commissioners. The Chairperson is the Mayor of Terschelling. The Secretary caters to all correspondence and administration. The Treasurer collects the dues and donations. There is a Commissioner of Materials, who is in charge of the logistics. He ensures the rope-stock is adequate and supplies for the evenings are in place. In the early days one commissioner represented the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* (Dutch Lutheran Church). They used to send a preacher who closed the gathering by prayer. However, since 1972 the church suspended this service.

KKF has had a fluctuating **membership**, consisting of students and teachers. In 1997 membership stood at 35. The minimum age to participate is 12.

There are 10 instructors, some having served over 25 years. They offer their services free of charge, getting only coffee and smokes. The teacher group is led by the course-leader. He has the final say on the contents. Being a KKF-student means hard work for a period of 3 to 4 years. Classes have their own teacher and they rotate every year.

After 4 years there is hardly a knot the students cannot tie. Upon completing the course they sit an exam and are familiar with a trade which can be used in their future life such as nautical sports and Scouts. On a sideline, it is remarkable to note that the Scouts did not manage to establish a foothold on the island.

The **location** of the Saturday evening meetings is “*Ons Huis*” (Torenstraat in West-Terschelling). Already before World War II, classes were also given in Hoorn. Initially in “*Het Evangelisatie Gebouw*”, nowadays the Thursday evening meetings are held in the village house “*De Stoek*”.

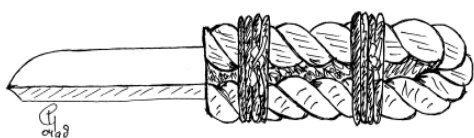
KKF owns lofts full of **material** to work with. It is tended caringly. Every autumn through till spring there are classes and the material is carefully handled. Thriftiness with their resources is part of the KKF tradition. Their materials are often obtained for free and all KKF-work is in the hands of volunteers. Materials for teaching are manila or sisal. Synthetic fibers are unsuitable. Thanks to the generosity of the Naval Shipyard in Den Helder, *Lankhorst Touwfabrieken* in Sneek and the diving team *Ecuador*, KKF does not suffer material problems.

Although KKF is not financially embarrassed, its economic means dwindle as time passes. By perpetually seeking donations the KKF council battles to retain lost ground. Even though the foundation does not have the same practical value as in the days of the sailing traders, for yachtsmen knowledge of ropework remains a necessary skill. Also KKF’s significance as a cultural-historical institute is duly recognized.

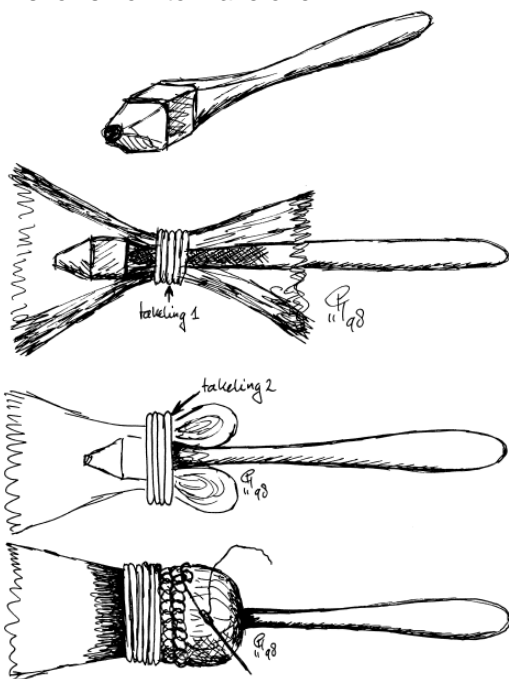
Members

The foundation also has a branch in the eastern part of Terschelling. Gert Doeksen from Midsland is their representative. He specializes in so-called “*Terschellinger Gespekte Matter*”. This is a canvas-work tradition, which remained specific to the islands. A piece of canvas is “embroidered” with a special stitch till patterns emerge [3], [9].

Sailorman Arie de Jong has been obsessed with knots all his life. He once passed the KKF-exam with a flying 120 points (out of the 140 point top score). During his many foreign voyages he spotted knots and rope working techniques all over the world. He has magnificent stories about a trip to Norway where he witnessed 2 men splicing away 3 strands in one go in a 6-strand wire rope. After his retirement he continued knotting. He has impressive samples of the brushes explained below. His unique bell pulls boast a finishing touch of seal fur (from discarded lady's handbags!) and his reputation as KKF-knife maker in unequalled. He carves rope and knot patterns into the hardwood handles. Arie also puts his skill to the making of sea chests and becketts.



KKF is frequently consulted by knotters from the Netherlands and the Flemish part of Belgium. This is due to the fact that KKF had presentations at the HISWA, an annual yacht show in Amsterdam. At their booth you could order custom-made rope work. In the KKF-records you can see that Mrs. Sprenger from Amsterdam paid 55 cents for a brush on March 12th 1942. These brushes have been the KKF trademark for many years. The illustration below shows how to make one.



KKF Exams

The annual course extends from the third Saturday of September till 2 weeks before Easter. This amounts to approximately 20 weeks, as Christmas time is taken off. Participation costs about 10 Euros, which is roughly 50 eurocents per class. Ever since classes started the entrance fee has been kept low to enable the poorest of island families to join. At the end of the 3-year course there is an exam.

Your name may be Clifford Ashley, but if you have not faithfully attended three subsequent terms, you will not be allowed to enter the KKF-exam [14]. They are pretty strict about that tradition. The exam consists of 14 parts, each worth a score from 1 to 10. The results are meticulously recorded in a big book. When you have 84 or more points you pass. Most students pass. Failing seldom occurs. The independent exam committee ensures prejudice can play no role. The exam itself is a challenge. What to make of two exam days running from 9 to 5? If you are ignorant of knots, it will be impossible to pass. On the other hand the exam's severity prevents a give away. Up till 1999 KKF had handed out 500 certificates to established rope workers.

In February of the third year the teachers decide whether their students are fit for the exam. The course leader has the final say. The KKF-council has no say. During the Easter school-holidays a 2-day exam session is held. The independent exam commission consists of former sea captains and KKF-teachers, but no council members take part.

Upon passing these tests the students obtain a diploma, which has been designed by Mr. Oxenaar, whom is famous for his work on Dutch banknotes, military certificates, banners, etc. The KKF diploma is decorated with the old five-colored coat of arms of Terschelling, captured in a grommet. The rim consists of a miscellany of knots and splices. Celebrations mark the festive closer during graduation.

Anecdotes

Klaas Knop was a modest man at most times but there is a splendid true story about how he paid a visit to Queen Wilhelmina to promote his knotting activity in the 1930s. He journeyed to the Royal Palace with his suitcase full of knots and was granted an audience by Her Majesty, the grandmother of the current queen of the Netherlands. It is undisclosed what they discussed, but she let him do the decorative marlinspike seamanship on the Royal Yacht "*Piet Hein*".

VEREENIGING
"KLAAS KNOP FONDS
VOOR ZEEMANSKUNST"

TERSCHELLING (THE NETHERLANDS)

SOCIETY
"KLAAS KNOP CLUB
FOR SEAMAN'S ART"



Undergeteekenden verklaren
hiermede dat



We, the undersigned, herewith
declare that

ANTON GERARD CUPIDO.

Geboren 22 September 1969 born 22nd September 1969

met goed gevolg een "Cursus in
Knoopen en Splitsen" van boven-
vermelde Vereniging heeft
doorloopen gedurende 3 jaren.

has been successfully attending a
"Course of Knotting and Splicing"
of the above-mentioned Society
during 3 years.

Terschelling,

17-4-1984.

De Raad van Toezicht

The Board of Control

Het Dagelijksch Bestuur

The Managing Committee

The foundation has a rich social history. Handwritten minutes, dating back in an unbroken line to 1961 is witness of an active life, which moves all the way up to the Mayors of Terschelling, who are chairpersons of KKF. Over the years KKF has received many membership requests. A young man from Brussels even contemplated emigrating to Terschelling in order to attend the meetings. He was comforted with a big box of knot work. Or what to think about the boy from Harlingen, whose Terschelling grandmother offered him a room for three winters, so he could follow the course? Despite the strict rules everybody finds a helpful KKF.

KKF in the Press

If you trawl the internet not much information will be found on KKF. However, many members of the Dutch Knotting Tribe know, or have heard about, the organization. KKF occasionally makes recorded history. It is mentioned and thanked extensively in the forwords of many reprints of the famous Dutch *Schiemanswerk* by the ANWB [5]. This is a high-impact source, which was used extensively in the Dutch yachting and barge world.

Epilogue

This article was not so much about knots as it is about particular social aspects of our subject. I hope to have been able to sketch an image of the remarkable achievements by the Klaas Knop Foundation on Terschelling. Keen knotters have organized themselves everywhere in the world. But rarely does their track record match that of KKF. In fact most believe their endeavors are restricted to their own little time span in space. This is well illustrated by the success of Klaas Knop's initiative. By 2000 their diploma surprisingly turned out to *not* be millennium proof. Obviously nobody ever expected KKF would hold out so long!

Acknowledgements

This paper was compiled from a number of sources. It is my pleasure to thank Gerard Ruyg (1935-), a respected KKF member since 1971 and probably life-long standing. Photographs are courtesy of his historic KKF-collection. Gerard took over the KKF-torch from his father, who took over from Klaas Knop personally, when he retired. Likewise Gerrit Doeksen of Midsland greatly contributed to the information presented here.

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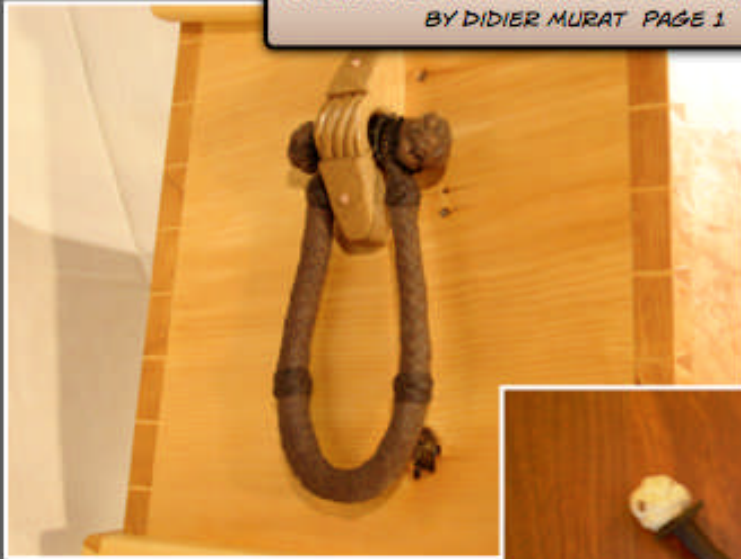
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Stiphout, July 2008



Some fancywork examples by Pieter van de Griend

TRADITIONAL SAILOR'S CHEST BECKET

BY DIDIER MURAT PAGE 1



IT WAS CUSTOMARY FOR SAILORS TO MAKE THE HANDLES TO THEIR SEACHESTS IN A WAY THAT WOULD SHOWCASE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF ROPEWORK AND KNOT TYING. FROM A SIMPLE LOOP OF ROPE TO VERY INTRICATE WORK, IT MADE EACH CHEST UNIQUE WITH THE OWNER'S TOUCH.

MATERIAL AND TOOLS:
3/8" HEMP OR MANILA ROPE.
ASSORTMENT OF TARRED HEMP
THREAD.
LEATHER SCRAPS.
CLOTH, NEEDLES AND THREAD.
MARLINSPIKE, AWL,
SAWING PALM, NETTING
NEEDLE, SERVING Mallet



WE WILL START WITH THE "BOLT" WHICH SERVES AS A HINGE AXLE. TAKE TWO FEET OF 3/8" ROPE, AND ADD ONE STRAND TO MAKE A FOUR STRAND ROPE. SAW A 4" LENGTH OF THICK LEATHER. SOAK THE LEATHER TO SOFTEN IT, AND PIERCE IT WITH AN AWL FOR THE THREAD - CAREFUL MEASURING IS IMPORTANT, THE LEATHER SHOULD BE VERY TIGHT TO THE ROPE TO MAKE A STIFF AXLE.

NOW THE TEDIOUS PART... COVER EACH STRAND WITH A LIGHT WEIGHT CLOTH. I SEW LITTLE STRIPS ON A SEWING MACHINE, FLIP THEM INSIDE OUT AND SLIDE THEM ONTO THE STRANDS. MAKE IT AS TIGHT A FIT AS POSSIBLE. THIS WILL MAKE A NOTICEABLE ESTHETIC DIFFERENCE IN YOUR FINISH BECKET. THERE IS A MULTITUDE OF CHOICES FOR THE STOP KNOT... IN THIS CASE IT IS A DIAMOND AND CROWN KNOT. A SINGLE CROWN FOLLOWED BY A WALL AND THEN FOLLOW THE LEADS WITH A SECOND

TRADITIONAL SAILOR'S CHEST BECKET

BY DIDIER MURAT PAGE 2

TIE ONE KNOT, CUT 4
LEATHER WASHERS
JUST SLIGHTLY SMALLER
THAN THE DIAMETER OF
THE FINISHED KNOT



THE HANDLE IS ALSO MADE WITH 3/8" ROPE, 3 STRANDS, ABOUT 3 FEET LONG. THE BODY OF THE HANDLE IS 22" AND ABOUT 3" FOR EACH EYE. START WITH THE EYE HITCHING IF YOU DON'T HAVE A NETTING NEEDLE, AND THEN SPLICE BOTH EYES. KEEP A MARK AT THE MIDDLE OF YOUR HANDLE AND KEEP SPLICING UNTIL YOU REACH THE MIDDLE POINT FROM BOTH ENDS. MAKE AN OTHER 3 OR 4 PASSES ON EACH SIDE, OVERLAPPING THE SPLICE AND AT THE SAME TIME TRIM THE STRANDS TO CREATE A TAPERED THICKER MIDDLE SECTION.

THE NEXT STEP IS TO PARCEL AND SERVE. IT IS A TRADITIONAL WAY TO WRAP ROPES OR CABLES WITH CLOTH AND TIGHTLY COVER WITH TARRED HEMP TO HELP PROTECT AGAINST ABRASION AND THE ELEMENTS. HERE IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO USE PRICY TARRED HEMP, SMALL MANILA ROPE WILL DO.



PARCELING: CUT STRIPS OF CANVAS, AND TIGHTLY COVER THE LENGTH OF THE HANDLE, A FEW EXTRA LAYERS IN THE MIDDLE WILL ADD TO THE TAPERED THICKER CENTER.

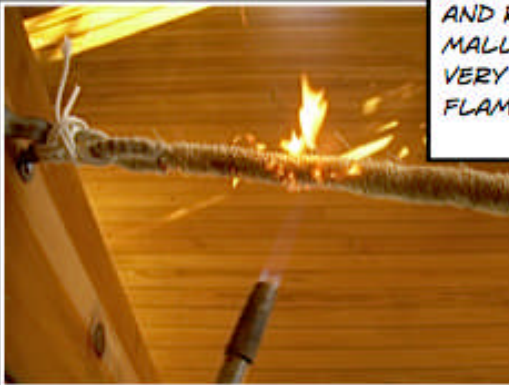
TRADITIONAL SAILOR'S CHEST BECKET

BY DIDIER MURAT PAGE 3

NEXT, "SERVE" THE HANDLE. YOU WILL NEED TO STRETCH IT BETWEEN TWO POST, A DOOR JAM WORKS GREAT, MAKING SURE IT CAN NOT ROTATE ON ITSELF, AND START SERVING FROM EYE TO EYE, STARTING BY MAKING 2 OR 3 VERY TIGHT TURNS BY HAND AND THEN WITH YOUR SERVING Mallet. IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE OF THOSE, IT IS EASY TO MAKE... FROM A REGULAR WOODEN Mallet, GOUGE LENGTHWISE A SMALL CHANNEL AND SCREW A SPOOL TO THE TOP OF THE HANDLE. IT WILL TAKE LESS TIME AND ENERGY THAN GETTING SOMEONE TO HELP YOU, AND YOU END UP WITH AN OTHER NIFTY TOOL.



AFTER YOU HAVE STARTED A FEW TURNS BY HAND, PLACE YOUR Mallet ON THE HANDLE AND MAKE TWO LOOPS AROUND THE Mallet'S HEAD, AND ANOTHER ONE OR TWO AROUND THE HANDLE. THIS WILL CREATE FRICTION THAT YOU WILL CONTROL WITH YOUR HAND AS YOU MAKE THE TURNS. PRACTICE, AND GAGE THE STRENGTH OF YOUR ROPE, IT IS VERY EASY TO MAKE IT SNAP. THE SERVING SHOULD BE A LOT TIGHTER AND REGULAR THAN IF MADE BY HAND WITHOUT THE Mallet. YOUR HANDLE AT THIS POINT WILL BECOME VERY STIFF AND SHOULD BE NICE AND ROUND. WITH A FLAME, BURN THE LITTLE FIBERS STICKING OUT.



CUT SOME MORE STRIPS OF CLOTH AND HEM THEM TO ABOUT 1/4 OR 5/16" WIDE AND 50" LONG. WE WILL USE EIGHT STRIPS. START FROM THE MIDDLE AND WORK YOUR WAY TO THE EYES.



TRADITIONAL SAILOR'S CHEST BECKET

BY DIDIER MURAT PAGE 4



WEAVE THE STRIPS
ALONG THE HANDLE,
TIE THE ENDS AND
COVER WITH A SMALL
TURK'S HEAD KNOT.

ASSEMBLE THE BECKET
WITH A LEATHER WASHER
ON BOTH SIDES OF THE
EYES, AND TIE THE
SECOND KNOT AS PER
PAGE 1.

TURK HEAD KNOTS CAN BE
ADDED ON THE REST OF
THE HANDLE.

PAINT THE BECKET WITH
PINE TAR, AND YOU WILL
HAVE BOTH THE AUTHENTIC
LOOK AND SMELL OF A
TRADITIONAL BECKET.
NOT A PLEASANT ODOR
FOR SOME, AND A
DEFINITE WAY TO
RECONNECT WITH
TRADITIONAL SAILING FOR
OTHERS.

SOME WERE PAINTED WITH
DIFFERENT COLORS AS
CAN BE SEEN ON OLD
BECKETS.



TRADITIONAL SAILOR'S CHEST BECKET
BY DIDIER MURAT PAGE 5

RIGGER'S BENCH



I HOPE YOU ENJOY THIS TUTORIAL!
DIDIER MURAT, VERMONT USA SAILORSCHEST.COM

