

ROPES AND LINES

By Richard Sorokin

Q: When is a rope not a rope any more but a line?

A: When it is taken onboard a vessel.

When you bring a rope on board a vessel you are thinking of using it in a particular way. The use of the rope gives it a name. In the old sailing days there were so many ropes on board that knowing their names, what they did, and where they were was essential to running the ship and its survival.

On board, ship ropes are called lines. There are four main categories of lines.. Anchor lines & ground tackle, docking lines, standing rigging, and running rigging.

Standing rigging are lines that hold up the masts and spars. All lines of stationary nature such as shrouds, stays, foot ropes and all hauling ropes. Shrouds are the large ropes that hold the masts in place. They run to the side of the vessel and are tightened using dead eye blocks. Stays usually run fore and aft, are lighter and keep the masts in place. On some sailing vessels there were as many as 36 different stays.

Running rigging are the lines that move the sails. On the big old sailing vessels they moved the spars to move the sails. These lines were called braces. Sheet lines were used to haul the sails to the yards. On these sailing vessels there could be more than 60 different running rigging lines, all anchored at different locations about the vessel. All had to be learned. These ropes were Manila hemp; it rots and had to be tarred to last.

Today with our fore and aft rig, the lines that control the sails are all called sheet lines. Main sheet, jib sheets, Genoa sheets and spinnaker sheets. Lines to lift the sails into place are called halyards: main halyard, jib halyard, etc. The mast is held in place with stainless steel "stays" or shrouds.

While we have been studying the subject of ropes, it is a fact that a ship has but seven ropes! All the others, in sailor talk are referred to as lines, sheets or hauls.

Here are the "ropes" of a ship. Any sailor can tell how experienced a seaman is by listening to him talk of rigging. Never, except as follows, will he call any parts of the rigging "rope".

Foot rope-under the yards to stand on, also the bottom edge of a sail. Bolt rope: sewn around a sailing, or lowering a top-mast or a topgallant and royal mast. Man rope - the hand rope at the sea ladders and gangways. Mast rope is used in hoisting, or lowering a top mast, or a topgallant and royal mast. Buoy rope- rope attached to a buoy. Yard rope-the rope used in sending up and down yards. Wheel ropes are lead from the drum of an old fashioned hand wheel to the tiller purchase.

Today on our modern motor boats we have just two types of lines. We have docking lines: this includes spring lines; and we have anchor lines or ground tackle. On our patrol boats we also carry tow ropes, most do not.

Most docking lines and anchor lines are nylon today, strong and a bit elastic to handle sudden loads. On the modern sail boat stays are now stainless steel and halyards and sheet lines are all Dacron. Dacron is strong, will not rot and does not burn the hands as it passes through.

There are two main methods to connect lines; the use of knots for temporary connections and splicing for more permanent needs. A good sailor has to know his knots and splices. Marlinspike is the knowledge of ropes and lines.