

MARLINSIKE SEAMANSHIP

By Richard Sorokin

"Marlinspike seamanship is the branch of seamanship which has to do with the art of knot-making, splicing, rigging and tackles. Ever sailor in the day of sail had to be an expert in this branch. Not only did he need much of its teaching in his normal shipboard life but in times of storms, after a ship had been swept clean by some giant sea, or dismasted, he had to be able to turn to and repair it. No wonder that he constantly practiced rope work and unconsciously gauged the caliber and ability of his messmates by observing how well or how poorly he handled lines and ropes"

Ropes and Lines

There are three basic types of ropes, those made from vegetable fiber, metal or wire cable and man made fibers. The most popular natural fiber used was Manila hemp. It has a brilliant sheen, smooth and pliable, fiber round, easily separated, very light, length of angle fiber six to ten feet. Sisal was also used but lacks gloss, is stiff and harsh, length of fibers two to four feet.

The fiber were stretched and combed. Then it was twisted into small yarn like strings. These were then, in groups of three, twisted together. To make heavier ropes you took three of the last series and twisted them together. If the small strings were twisted to the right the compound rope, would be twisted to the left. This kept the ropes from unrolling. There use to be very long houses near the water fronts where rope making occurred. The natural fiber ropes were often coated with tar to prevent rot.

Steel cable is made up the same way, twisting smaller wire into larger bundles.

Man made fiber ropes include; Nylon, Dacron and plain plastics. The advantage of these man made ropes is that they do not rot. Nylon is usually twisted like Manila hemp. It is very strong and will stretch, this a great advantage for tying up at docks and anchor lines. Nylon rope will burn your hand if allowed to pass too quickly through your hands. Dacron lines have a woven cover over a twisted heart or center. It does not stretch and is kinder to you hands. These lines are very flexible and are very strong. Dacron lines make up all sail boat running rigging today.

You can purchase cheap plastic lines for some jobs. Be careful for they will snap suddenly. Never use plastic lines where life may be an issue.

Ropes aboard ship are a necessity, sailor motor. It serves so many purposes that the use and skill in its use is of prime importance.