

Marlinespike Seamanship

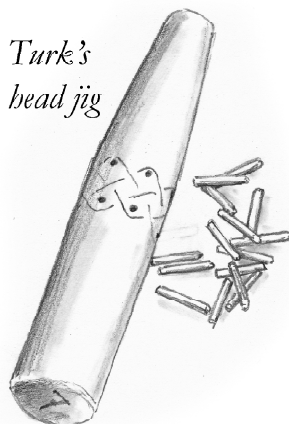
By Ted Walsh

Turk's Head Jig

The Turk's Head is perhaps the most recognizable of traditional marlinespike knots. There are numerous books and videos that will explain how to tie this knot, but the two key ingredients to having it come out right are getting it started correctly, and understanding how much the diameter of the knot will shrink as it is tied.

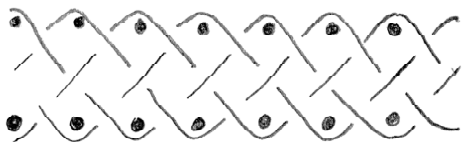
Starting the knot correctly can be really frustrating if you have not already mastered it. Even if you have mastered it, if you go a year or so without tying one, it is like learning to tie the knot all over again, at least it is for me. This is particularly true if you want to tie one of the more complex versions with three or more strands.

A Turk's Head jig won't make the knot easy to tie, but it can eliminate some of the frustration and make tying the knot more efficient. I have several of these in different sizes. They are easy to make and can take much of the frustration out of tying a beautiful and useful knot.



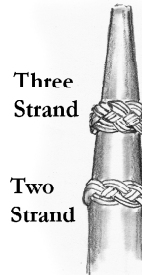
Turk's head jig

Seven bight Turk's head pattern



The principle is simple; you need to make a cylindrical cone with a gradual taper. Mine are made of wood, but you could use cardboard in a pinch. The trick is to diagram out the actual pattern of the first complete pass of the knot and drill or poke holes where each outside bight is located in the pattern. Then put short, 1/8" pegs in the holes (I just cut up a 1/8" dowel), which gives you a three-dimensional pattern to tie the first pass of the knot around. Once you have completed the first

circuit, pull out the pegs and continue the knot by following the pattern you have set up with the remaining line, until you have the number of strands that you want.



Three Strand

Two Strand

As the knot constricts with each additional strand, slide the Turk's Head further up the narrow end of the jig to accommodate the constricting of the knot.

One really nice thing about these jigs is that once you have set one up you are likely to be able to tie the knot the first time and have it come out well. Another is that if your objective is to tie the knot around something like a tiller, you can set up a jig, tie a knot fairly quickly and figure out how much the diameter

shrinks. Once you know that, you can easily start a second knot and adjust it to come out a little larger or smaller when you start, by leaving a little more slack, or adding

tension. Once you have completed your first pass around the jig, and when you remove your pegs, slide the first pattern of the new knot off the jig and onto the object around which the Turk's Head will be finished. Now complete the knot with some confidence that it will come out the correct size.

